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Hermit Kingdom LADAKH

Major H P S Ahluwalia



Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd



PRIME MINISTER

FOREWORD

For those who love unspoilt natural beauty, Ladakh has few equals. The mountains are majestic. The Gompas are so skilfully and artistically built that they seem to be extensions of the hills. The richness of the few patches of emerald green vegetation is enhanced by the dry starkness of the surroundings. The air is so clean, pure, rarefied. What a soothing sight for eyes wearied with the box-like and high-rise structures of contemporary towns. The people, especially the women, with their turquoise studded head-dresses, are no less picturesque.

Until recently the Valley was not open to tourists and had kept its character unsullied. Alas, the intrusion of streams of moneyed visitors has robbed it of its serenity, spontaneity and even piety and is denuding its monasteries of their ancient treasures.

For us, Ladakh has had a deeper significance since independence. It occupies a strategic position where our gallant soldiers stand guard as sentinals. In war and peace they are also friends and helpers of the people.

Major Ahluwalia, mountaineer and author, has captured the spirit of Ladakh and has brought to life this region of myth and mystery to those who may not have the opportunity of visiting it themselves.

Indira Gandhi
(Indira Gandhi)

New Delhi,
May 19, 1980

Preface

It was during one of my early visits to Ladakh that the idea of writing this book was born. The idea took firmer roots when I found that there was little authentic material on the "Central Asian Diamond"—that still glows and glitters like a polished antique gold coin. Ladakh with its stark wilderness, snow-clad mountains, rustic beauty and its rich ancient culture had compelled me to go deeper into the mystery of its history, tradition and heritage. Attempts to get to its history became an extremely difficult task, especially as I was told that many records had been either burnt or stolen in the numerous invasions that took place in this region.

There are a number of books on the subject by various authors based on the theory that Ladakh was a part of Tibet. This to my mind is far from the truth when one examines the historical facts. Even by the Tibetan concept and geographical division, the area occupied by the ancient gNa-ris-skor-sum (Greater Ladakh) consisted of the Upper Indus and Suttlej valleys:-i) Purang, Mang-Yul and Zaskar, ii) Li (Khotan), Brusha (Dardistan) and Shalti (Baltistan), and iii) Zhang-Zhung, Khri-Lde and Stod-Smad. It was a rich, independent kingdom till the end of the 17th century when Tibet annexed the gold-bearing area of gNa-ris-skor-sum with the result that greater Ladakh shrunk to its present size.

While Ladakh remained under secular rule throughout its history, the kingdom's government and culture were greatly influenced by Buddhism and its institutions. Indeed, Buddhism had an early beginning in Ladakh, its introduction probably preceding the arrival of the faith in either China or Tibet. In 241 B.C. King Asoka sent missionaries to the area, which up to that time had practised a mixture of animism and totemism. Further, according to Cunningham, it was from Ladakh itself that Buddhism subsequently spread into Tibet and China.

Ladakh has been erroneously described in many books as "Little Tibet." The factual position, Ladakhi scholars tell me, is that the term "Tibet-e-Khurd" is referred to Baltistan. "Khurd" is a Persian word meaning "Little". Another term wrongly used for Ladakh is "Tibet-e-Kalan". "Kalan" is also a Persian word meaning "Greater". By eighth century nomenclature, "Greater Tibet" comprised of West and Central Tibet. I would like to call Ladakh "The Hermit Kingdom". Its monasteries, perched on the highest crags and in hidden folds of the vast mountains, its forts and its ancient high altitude caravan routes have impressed me. I have also been influenced by its sparse population and stony silence which makes this rugged kingdom ideal for lamas or monks wanting to enter hermitage to seek salvation.

While writing this book, I visited Ladakh a number of times. Each trip was a new experience for me as I discovered a new facet of this region. The area is so vast that to do full justice to its land and its people one would have to spend a much longer time there, may be even a few years. However, my last visit was to the Nubra valley. What a memorable experience it was to be in this valley which is still forbidden to the tourists. As rightly described by the travellers of yore, this is one of the most beautiful valleys of the world. Its natural splendour, breathtaking beauty, the simplicity of its inhabitants and their joie de vivre produce an unforgettable impression on every visitor. It is indeed a haven for poets and artists.

It was an exciting moment for my wife and myself to have met a number of travellers from the valley who had been engaged with the old trade caravans to Kashgar and Yarkand. We were also fortunate to come across bactrian double-humped camels which are on the verge of extinction but steps are being taken to preserve this docile looking animal.

I am grateful to a number of individuals for their assistance in the production of this book. Besides those mentioned in the "Acknowledgements" I would like to express my special gratitude to Nita Thapar for loaning me her private collection of old and rare books on Ladakh and suggesting the title of the book. I am also grateful to S.S. Gergan for his valuable suggestions and guidance at every stage during the preparation of the book.

I would also like to thank F.M. Hassnain, Director Archives, Srinagar for allowing me to photograph the covers of the 5th century Gilgit manuscript. I understand that this manuscript lay buried in Gilgit for over one thousand years and was only discovered sometime during the 18th century. 'Hermit Kingdom' is fortunate to carry in colour the first ever reproduction of the covers of this very rare manuscript.

I am grateful to Subhash Kirpekar of the Times of India for going through the entire transcript, to Harbans Lal Tandon for much help and keeping my records in order, and Harjit Singh of Jawahar Lal Nehru University for his valuable suggestions.

I am also grateful to the Library of Tibetan works and archives for allowing me to use the glossary of places and names in Ladakh by F.A. Peter. The spellings of the places and names in the glossary do differ from those given in the text. The spellings used in the glossary are close to indigenous orthography or the Tibetan text but in the main text the places are spelt as they are pronounced today and as per the latest maps of the region.

Ladakh may well be regarded today as being one of the last surviving fortresses of Tibetan culture wrapped in a fanfare of ancient glory. In this book, I have attempted to give readers an insight into the life-style of the people of Ladakh and have tried somewhat to set the historical record straight. I shall have more than fulfilled my objective if this book provokes readers to see Ladakh for themselves and explore some of its fascinating aspects. I shall be delighted, if in the process of doing so, more authentic material about Ladakh is unearthed and more books written.

H.P.S. AHLUWALIA

New Delhi
February 23, 1980

Contents

Foreword	v
Preface	vii
LEH	Page No. 1
NAMGYALS	35
Pre-Namgyal Period	48
Namgyal Rule	49
Dogra Invasion	51
Post-Independence Developments	54
LADAKHI WEDDING	59
Peculiar Ladakhi Customs	74
Festivals	75
HEMIS	77
Gompas	87
Lama Dance	91
Hermitage	94
Kalacakra	98
FESTIVAL OF FERTILITY	111
HIGHEST ROAD IN THE WORLD	119
Nubra Valley	121
Himalayas	138
JULE	155
Field Research Laboratory	157
Moravian Mission	159
TEMPERATURE CHART	168
GLOSSARY OF PLACE NAMES IN LADAKH	170
GLOSSARY	178
BIBLIOGRAPHY	180
LIST OF COLOUR ILLUSTRATIONS	181
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	183
INDEX	184

Leh





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"If there is a paradise on earth, it is here, it is here, it is here," exclaimed the Moghul king, Jahangir, moved to such ecstasy by the beauty of Kashmir. He was doubtlessly, enthralled by the valley's lush greenery, its abundance of flowers and fruits, its shimmering springs and translucent lakes. He could not possibly have been thinking of that arid region in eastern Kashmir which is known as Ladakh and which recent historical events have brought into the limelight. But if Ladakh cannot boast of nature's bounty, its high desert plateaus and granite peaks have a rugged charm of their own. And its isolated, ancient culture endows it with a mystery which irresistibly attracts the explorer and the tourist alike.

Its location has earned Ladakh the nickname of "Central Asian Diamond," which brought the various realms of Asia together through certain important trade routes connecting lands lying on all its four sides. The minor routes acted as links to the major routes lying to the north and south of Ladakh. For example, the "Silk Route" that connected China with the Middle East lay to the north of Ladakh. It was never a terminal point for any major route, never a *cul-de-sac* or a blind alley, but always a transit area, a region of interaction for people from neighbouring regions.

With its borders touching Tibet, Chinese Sinkiang and Baltistan, and with the Soviet Union, Pakistan and Afghanistan in close proximity, Ladakh occupies a highly strategic position. It remained closed to visitors for almost a quarter century, and it has only recently been opened to tourists. Of the roads leading to Leh, the capital of Ladakh, the only one suitable for motor traffic is that from Srinagar, a two-day drive. This highway remains snow-bound from October till May. It takes one month to clear about ten million cubic feet of snow from a ninety kilometre stretch of the road and costs six million rupees a year.

My journey to Leh was, however, made by air. Accompanied by my wife, Bholi, I took off from Chandigarh in the morning. Within a few minutes we had left the dusty plains behind and were flying over the great Himalayas and Zaskar ranges with snow-clad peaks stretching as far as the eye could see. Beneath us was a sea of white, undisturbed snow. In vain did we look for a footstep somewhere. There was not a spot that man, bird or animal had trodden upon. But soon, there was a distinct change in the mountain-scape. Abruptly, it seemed, the snow had rolled away. There was no more white. It looked as if some mighty hand had plucked the sheet of snow away, exposing the mountain. We now saw brown dust and black rocks. We were over the strange, barren land of Ladakh.

It was a fantastic sight as the valley of Indus stretched down below, surrounded by the barren and desolate horseshoe-shaped mountains where not even a blade of grass grows. As we flew over this mysterious land which has been invaded since time immemorial, many thoughts crowded my mind. I visualized the invasions by the Turks, the Baltis, the Moghuls and the Dogras—hordes of riders, uttering war cries, their swords flashing as they entered into battle. Perhaps they trundled along some canons too. From the medley of thoughts an English name arose, that of Godwin Austen, who was the second European to penetrate into the vicinity of the world's second highest mountain K-2, which is here, towards the north-west. "Captain Austen," I ruminated, "what made you, a young British officer, come all the way here in the nineteenth century, to a land so far removed from your own country?" But even as I posed the question, I knew the answer. In the words of Mallory, a famous mountaineer: "You climb the mountains because they are there."

Not far off was another well-known summit—Nanga Parbat. I thought of Herman Buhl and how he had conquered this great mountain alone. Many a glorious battle may be fought without swords or bombs, I mused. As we passed by the scenes of those heroes' exploits, I felt like a pilgrim and saluted them. Then, to the north, not far from here, lay the heart of



Hiuen Tsang



Marco Polo

Leh Palace, late 19th century A.D.





Leh bazar

Asia with the ancient cities of Kashgar, Yarkand and Khotan, with many historic and romantic associations—nestling in these barren hills and plateaus from where the names of the great explorers like Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang and Marco Polo emerged. It struck me that at one time, great cities must have existed in these barren lands. Recent archaeological research, particularly that conducted by Sir Aurel Stein in Central Asia, points to this fact. There were perhaps many lakes, but loss of moisture through evaporation and changes in atmospheric conditions extended the desert, water courses dried up, and the oases became smaller and smaller.

I was still in the midst of these thoughts, when we landed on this dry, dusty stretch of land. It was Leh, the capital of Ladakh, which by virtue of being situated at 3,500 metres above sea-level, becomes one of the highest valleys in the world. The three-letter word “Leh,” which appears prominently in all maps of the area, means “oasis.”

We immediately sensed the air, cool and almost pure. We noticed the dryness in it and were told that since the air is extremely rarefied, it is incapable of holding any moisture. Our drive from the airstrip to the Alpha Mess was fascinating. It was a beautiful, well-laid road, looking neat and clean, as if someone had just swept the dust off its even surface. There was no rubbish lying along the roadside.

It was early October, when it is neither very hot nor very cold in Leh. The green leaves of

the trees were turning into a rich yellow and gold. September-end and early October is the best period to visit Ladakh. January and February are extremely cold. Spring comes late here and the trees do not break into foliage till June.

A peculiarity of Ladakh is that its *gompas* (monasteries), dark and gloomy inside, are constructed at the highest and isolated points on the rocky mountains. The immediate reaction on seeing a typical Ladakhi monastery is one of surprise because one feels that it will slide down the cliff any moment, so precariously balanced does it appear. With a gasp, Bholi asked me how they ever managed to construct anything so big and high at that altitude in those days, when not very much could have been known about construction engineering.

Yet another feature of Ladakh is its numerous hot springs, whose waters are attributed with curative qualities for ailments like rheumatism, ulcers and other skin diseases. It also has many lakes, the important ones being Pangong, Morarai and Kar Tso. Pangong Tso, the largest lake in Ladakh, is 136 kilometres long and situated at a height of approximately 4,550 metres, with the Tibetan border running along its eastern end. The crest of the great Himalayan range to the south and south-west of Ladakh prevents the monsoon from entering it and leaves the valley absolutely arid. There is hardly fifty millimetres of rainfall in a year. The snow line is higher here than in most other comparable places and the greater portion of land remains uncultivated. But in spite of the dryness, the land being stony, some cultivation of wheat and barley is done. Tamarisks, poplars, willows, *elaagnus* and junipers are grown here.

Since I had been in the Valley of Flowers at a height of 3,500 metres in the Central Himalayas in the early part of the year, I did not expect to be troubled by altitude sickness, though I was not entirely sure of how my body would react to the low pressure and paucity of oxygen in Leh. Neither was I sure about how Bholi would adapt to this peculiar situation. The altitude effect in this region on the human body is far more severe than at the same height elsewhere.

The paucity of oxygen in the dry rarefied atmosphere reduces human efficiency by forty per cent. In order to avoid any complication, I decided to be guided by the principal "Go high, sleep low." I used this formula frequently during my climbs and have found it most successful. It means that if you have to stay at an altitude of about 3,000 metres, you must go 100 to 150 metres higher and then come down. The altitude effect then becomes much less severe. With this in mind, after leaving the luggage at the Alpha Mess, where we had a hot cup of tea, we drove towards Leh town and beyond, to gain this height. Since Leh has been linked by air to facilitate tourist traffic, I need to strike a note of caution here. The temptation to fly straight to Leh, in my view, should be resisted for acclimatization reasons. The drive up to Leh by road from Srinagar, a two-day drive, would not only smoothen the process of acclimatization, but would also show the tourists more land en route. Flying back from Leh, however, would pose no acclimatisation hazards. So the motto for the Leh-bound tourist should be "Drive in, fly out."

The township of Leh, an oasis in a snow desert extending over hundreds of kilometres, is a strange mixture of old and new structures, of large buildings with narrow window openings and clusters of *chortens* standing against the huge backdrop of a granite hill, Leh is an extraordinary town. Its most impressive sight is a massive stone castle rising almost vertically into the air. This was the seat of the rulers of Ladakh. In the 1840s, after the Dogras took over Ladakh, the ruler of Ladakh who lived at Leh Palace was deposed and Stok village on the left bank of the Indus, was given to him as *jagir* (estate). Thereafter he lived at Leh Palace during the winter months when most of the festivals were held and in summer he shifted to Stok. The



Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Kashmir with Wa-zir Zo-ra-war Singh.





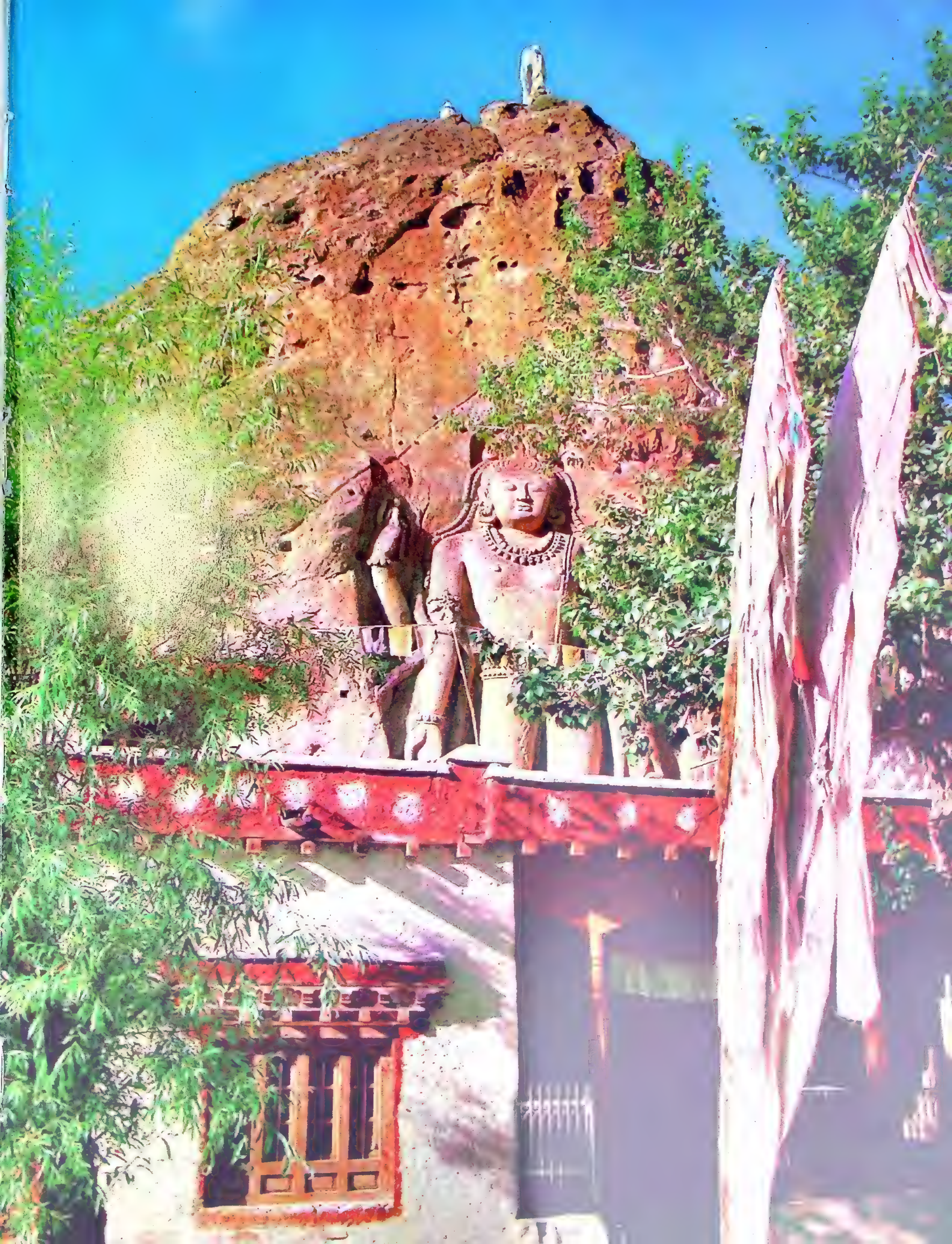


Ten million cubic feet of snow is cleared every year from the Leh-Srinagar highway before the tourist season opens.

height of 3,500 metres.

Rock-carving of Maitreya at Mulbek, 10th century A.D. ►

Autumn at its best in village Nimo. ►►









The Kargil mosque.



Ladakhi Muslims from Kargil.

palace is like a tower on the lofty hill overlooking the entire city. It has nine stories. The outer walls rise steeply with their thickness decreasing gradually with the increase in height. These walls have been pierced at a number of places to provide windows for the building. The upper stories have long balconies and the beams of the roof are supported by carved wooden pillars.

The main street of Leh is the new bazar which was laid out by Captain Trench in 1897. The few shops on both sides of the street sell the general merchandise which one finds in any bazar in India. But the singular difference here is the absence of noise in the bazar. There was no shouting by shopkeepers or vendors although some of them had spread out their goods on the pavements. Except for the passing of an odd vehicle there was complete silence. I understand that this is a characteristic of this region. Even in the past, it was noticed by many travellers who walked through the bazar without even guessing that there was a big caravan camped close by.

Towards the end of the bazar, there are pavement vegetable sellers, who at this time of the year were selling vegetables of the season. The carrots were rather sweet. I had never seen such jumbo-sized cabbages, turnips, carrots, radishes and cauliflowers. The tomatoes too were unusually large. I wonder whether this was due to the nature of the soil, or to the pure rays of the sun, which act as a natural feed. In olden days, this was a very popular bazar where people used to buy and sell their wares, and also a place where many races met. Tibetans came here from Lhasa, after a three-month journey. People from Peshawar and Baltistan, whose grey costumes blended with the grey-white rocks of this area, also jostled in this bazar—with the clumsy Kashgaris in their *chogas*. Polo, a popular game in Leh, was regularly played in the bazar every afternoon. It was a practice which continued till as late as the 1950s, when all the shops closed every afternoon to enable people to participate in the polo match. Anybody with a horse, a polo stick and plenty of guts could join the game.

In those days, one could see many varieties of dry fruit, gold, silver and all kinds of precious stones. Clothes ranging from coarse cloth to *pashmina* (fine wool), costly Chinese velvets, and expensive skins of otters, weasels, lynxes and snow leopards were sold.

It is not easy to photograph the locals here as some of them are terribly shy of the camera. Bholi tried to photograph a beautiful Ladakhi girl with Caucasian features, but without success. She was beautifully dressed and her costume looked as if it had been designed by an artist for some opera. Her eyes were like black cherries. On her head she wore the usual cobra-like headgear called *perak*, studded with turquoises falling down on her back. Around her waist she wore a girdle. With her slender figure she made a pretty picture. But in spite of our requests she did not allow herself to be photographed. The girls selling vegetables were more obliging.

Leh is a town both interesting and strange. Its historical importance lies in its having been in the past the principal station on the Central Asian highway from India to Yarkand and Kashgar. The caravans usually arrived in the spring and autumn and gave the town a very busy look with its bazar crowded with people of all Asiatic races. The merchants and caravans were accommodated in *sarais* (inns). For the convenience of the traders from Central Asia, the British government had constructed *sarais* at all stages from Panamik in Nubra to Sringar. The biggest was in Leh, where the traders stocked such commodities as silks, *namdas* (rugs), velvets, tea (which came from China via Lhasa) and Indian products such as cotton cloth, dyes and coarse sugar. Trade activity was at its peak between July and October. An interesting feature was that the traders stocked their goods here without fear of pilferage. There have been instances when packages were left for years without being damaged or tampered with. The *sarai* consisted of a two-storeyed building around an irregular square. While animals and piles of goods were neatly stacked in the square, the traders lived in the building. The goods quite



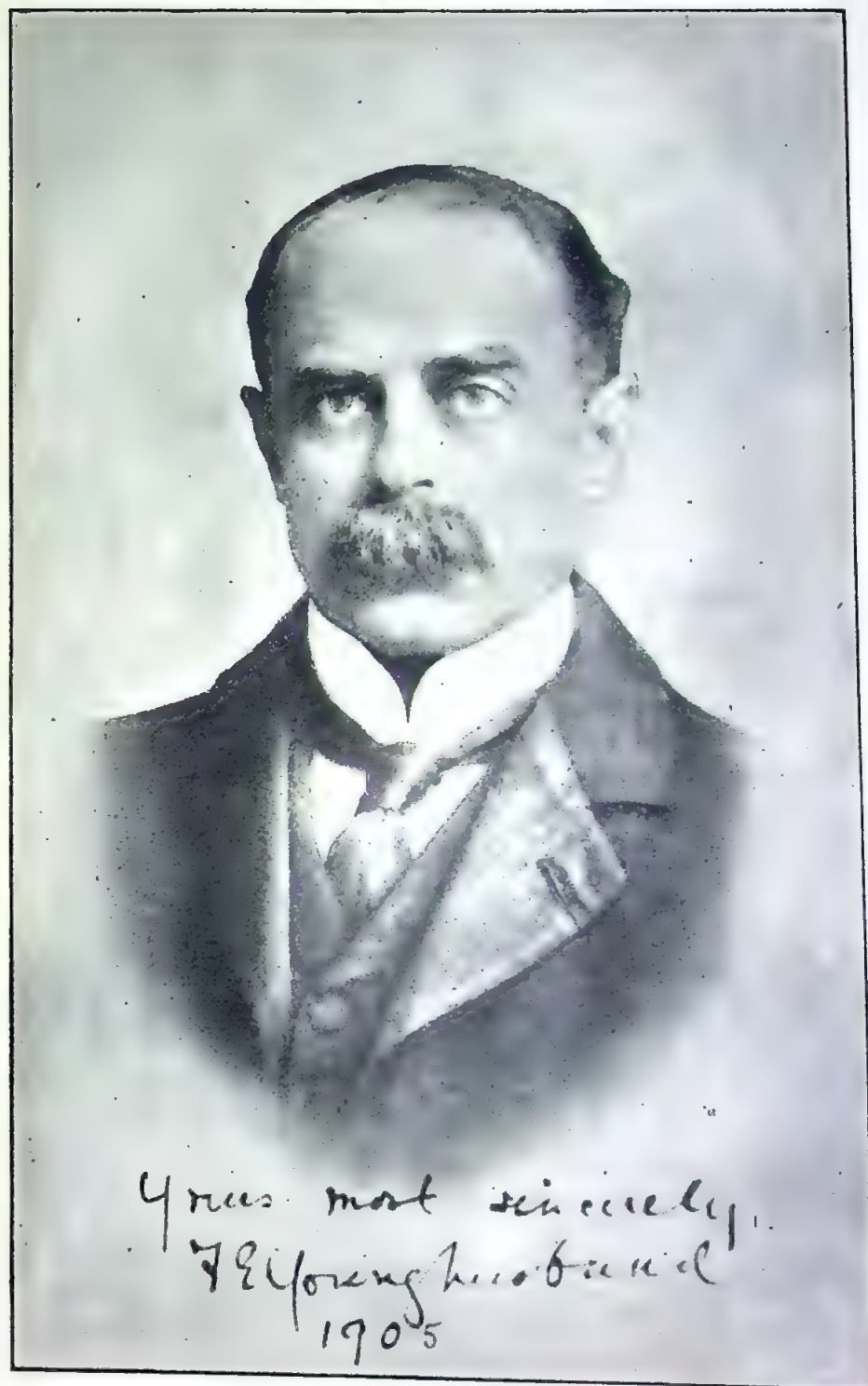
Vegetable sellers

often changed hands here from the merchants who brought them from Kashgar, Yarkand and other places with those who carried them and disposed them off in Srinagar, Lahore or Amritsar. Often the packages would be opened in the *sarai* itself, before changing hands, giving it an appearance of bazar. Carpets from Khotan and *namdas* from Yarkand were two prominent items of trade.

It was late in the evening when we returned to the Mess. The cool breeze that had begun to sweep the valley just around sunset seemed pleasant then. Now, with the sun gone, a sudden chill gripped the valley. We were in for a cold night. I decided to go to my cottage. Alpha Mess had two such cottages beautifully laid with a garden in front and poplar and willow trees all round. The cottage, where I was staying had two rooms and a lounge and they were all well heated.

The army had made excellent arrangements for me and I knew it was going to be a very comfortable stay. The Alpha Mess staff was extremely cordial and served us piping-hot dinner in our cottage. There was no difficulty in getting chilled beer. All one had to do was to keep the beer bottles out in the open for a few minutes. After the meal, I relaxed near the fire-place and picked up the book *Moved On* by P.S. Nazarov, in which he has described his fascinating journey from Kashgar to Srinagar.

A number of my old friends, with whom I had served earlier in the army called on me. It was a happy reunion. I had served in the Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering. The



Sir Francis Younghusband

officers graciously invited us to a weekend dinner at their mess which is picturesquely situated besides the Indus. I was particularly happy to meet my coursemate, Col. S.P. Nijhawan.

The night fell over this enigmatic land with the sky deep blue and the silhouettes of mountains looking aloof and desolate. The silence was broken by the noise of the swift and harsh winds, which at times broke into a howl and shook the roof of the guest-house so violently, that it threatened to blow it off. But suddenly the fierce wind would die down into a gentle breeze and it would be calm again. This phenomenon continued almost throughout the night. I happened to look out from my bedroom window, and found the strange town

enveloped in complete calmness. The *gompas* and the fluttering of the flags tied to the poles combined in a fantastic view.

I was told that Sir Francis Younghusband had stayed, where I was staying at the Alpha Mess. As I lay in bed, trying to get some sleep, I thought how fortunate I was to be at a place where once stayed one of the greatest explorers of the time. I have a very special fascination for Sir Francis Younghusband as he, with Captain Bruce, was the first man to propose a definite expedition to Mount Everest in 1893, when they were together in Chitral near Gilgit. Their proposal was to undertake a highly adventurous journey from Chinese Turkistan across Tibet by ascending Mount Everest.

The next morning, we woke up to the strains of the villagers' melodious harvest songs. The sun was bright and we could see the golden foliage of the trees through the windows. The air was fresh and bracing. The sky was absolutely blue and clear. The temperature inside still remained very low and I could not sit in the room without a *bokhari*—a heater in which oil is burnt in a closed container which makes the room warm and pleasant. A clever tap-like contraption is attached to the *bokhari* to regulate the flow of oil according to the heat required. Also a bucket full of water is kept ready to compensate for the loss of the depleted moisture, as burning of the *bokhari* makes the air even drier. No heater or *bokhari* must be burnt or even half burnt right through the night as it can cause suffocation by making the air completely dry and burning away its oxygen content which is already quite low. The temperature outside was -10° to -20°C , and I am sure the temperature inside the room was quite low too. In fact, I have never felt so cold in my life, not even at the final camp on Everest, where we spent the night. I had to double the number of blankets here in my bed.



Rock carvings by the way side at Dras



C H I N A



SINKIANG



- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY
- STATE BOUNDARY
- DISTRICT BOUNDARY
- STATE CAPITAL
- DISTRICT HEADQUARTER
- OTHER TOWNS
- RIVERS
- MAIN ROADS
- TRACKS

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A Drive Along the Indus

It was a beautiful day, so we decided to drive down along the Indus. We took lunch packets with us. The road, which looks like a wavy black ribbon running through the valley, opened out into a vast, dry, dusty and mountainous area which stretched as far as the eye could see. It was a unique scene—inviting, yet forbidding. Our drive along the Indus was fascinating. The water was sparkling and crystal clear. Below us lay a beautiful oasis—a large scattered village called Nimo. We were standing almost 300 metres above the point where the Zaskar river, a tributary of the Indus, joins the main river. As the sun rays danced off the rippling waters, the river glittered in a riot of colours. It was a memorable sight!

The Indus, one of the four holy rivers of India, originates in the north of Mount Kailash in Central Tibet. Its Tibetan name is *Senge Khabab* and according to legend, the river flows out of a lion's mouth. The river flows north-west and after covering about 670 kilometres reaches Nimo, where it joins the Zaskar river and then flows to Skardu in Baltistan. After Skardu, the river has rapid descents and rushes down the Western Himalayas, passing roughly between K-2 and Nanga Parbat, and then, flowing south, close to Gilgit, it finally merges in the Arabian Sea.

The river is linked with one of the oldest civilizations of the world. When the first Aryans came from Central Asia, they settled in this valley of the Indus. Extensive excavations were carried out at two sites, Harappa and Mohenjodaro in 1922, uncovering the remains of two great cities of what is known as the Indus Valley Civilization. Some of the articles found in this area and a few seals have helped in dating this civilization to the later centuries of the third millennium BC and establishing the antiquity of the Indian civilization. Both the Brahmaputra and the Indus rivers originate from a height of about 5,200 metres, some distance away from the north of Mount Kailash but one flows towards the east and the other towards the west. After flowing like this for some distance, the rivers suddenly take a southward turn while all the other rivers in India flow southward from their origins. The behaviour of these two rivers and the pattern of flow is still under study and it is not clear whether the sudden change in their direction is due to the structural formations of the rock at the point.

The road from here goes down to the village Nimo and the Indus river after passing through a gloomy gorge, dramatically comes out into the open. It looks gorgeous. In the village there are *chortens*, little irrigation canals with crystal clear water and little houses of two or three storeys—characteristic of the Tibetan style, and of the type one generally finds in Sikkim. The balconies of the houses are decorated with flowers. The village is surrounded by mountains. This has often led people to observe that the mountains are like a group of old people, sitting in a circle, and the little village, like a small child sitting quietly in the centre, listening to their talk.

People were active in the fields, threshing their harvest. Trees were changing colour from green to yellow and purple and at some places golden-red. The tall and straight junipers stood like sentinels. But the most noticeable were the apple trees, their branches bent with the weight of red, juicy apples. From Nimo, we drove to Basgo. The road has houses on both sides. On the right are the rocky cliffs on which the houses are built. I do not understand why the Ladakhis want to have their living quarters higher and higher, giving themselves the extra burden of climbing up the rocks and carrying their daily provisions, drinking water, and fire-wood up these steep rocky paths. I suppose it is a passion with them to climb and bear all these hardships. Perhaps they even derive some pleasure from these arduous chores. This is not so in Sikkim and Nepal. Ladakhis, like birds who build their nests on high trees, apparently feel more comfortable and secure in houses perched on hill tops.



Gyalmo-The Queen of Ladakh, Namgyal Deskit





Caravan man and his family.





Jule





Festive attire.



Spinning and selling vegetables.



Irrigation.



Vegetable se



Polo made a beginning here.

Basgo is a beautiful village with poplar and willow trees and the Indus flowing by its side. In the village, we met a number of old people, who still had very vivid memories of the trade caravans that used to pass through this place on the way to the north and the caravans coming down from the north to Srinagar. The soil of Basgo is entirely different from that of other parts of Ladakh. It is ochre in colour and is used for making earthen ware. One of the people we met in Basgo was Chwang Kunkhep, who took us to his farm across the stream where threshing was in progress. Chwang looked more like a lama, with his *kantop*, a kind of hat, and maroon woolen gown. He had lovely turquoise ear-rings, unusually long for men. He looked remarkably young for his age which we guessed to be around fifty-two. He had many stories of the trade he used to carry on with Tibet as late as the sixties. He had begun the trade first with his father when he was a young boy of twelve or thirteen and then continued independently.

"My first visit to Tibet was when I had barely seen a dozen summers," Chwang told me. That was with the trade caravans which used to leave Basgo around June and head for Girchey in Tibet via Karu, Spituk, Shey, Chushul and Cinzong.

"We used to leave on our journey after attending the Hemis *mela*," Chwang recalled. He would load his merchandise on donkeys and keep a few horses for riding. The caravan would set out once the snows started melting in the high passes. "We would be on the road for nearly four to five months. We would take *tsampa*, apricots, *shahi tosa* and silver. We brought back from Tibet items like raw wool, *pashmina*, salt and precious stones and gold," he explained. "We would set forth in groups of six or seven men, each carrying his own goods. Each animal had a little musical bell, so that when we were all on the move, the individual chimes blended to create a harmonious musical tune which helped to ward off travel fatigue," he said. The area around Karakoram pass had gained notoriety as a place where caravans were attacked by bandits. "Once while we were returning from Yarkand, our caravan was attacked by bandits. While others were released after snatching their trade goods, I was kept a captive because I resisted. Later, taking advantage of the dark clouds and bad weather I escaped at night with one of their horses, some dried meat and made the journey alone back to Nubra valley," said Chwang. He narrated this incident with great excitement as was evident from his vigorous gestures and raised voice.

Chwang was not very happy at the discontinuance of trade with Tibet. "The suspense and the excitement of travel, the thrill of seeing new places and meeting people is no more," he lamented, inserting some snuff into one of his wide nostrils. Chwang narrated an interesting ceremony which was held after the caravans reached their destination. "The ceremony on such occasions was that a whole lamb was roasted for the caravan and an unlimited quantity of tea with bread-rolls and dry fruits was served to all. There was singing and dancing as well." This, I understand was in the nature of thanksgiving ceremony for a safe journey. It was popularly known as *Khudai*, a sacrifice to the Almighty God.

Yes, those trade expeditions combined profit with adventure, gains of which the entire trading community looked forward to. Chwang's son, now in the army, acted as the interpreter. Chwang's family impressed me a great deal.

We were so fascinated by this village alongside the Indus, that we decided to have our lunch there. I tied a couple of beer bottles with a string and holding on to one end, let the bottles dip into the river. The water was cold enough to chill the beer within a short time.

Basgo is a very prosperous village. The entire population is Buddhist. While in old times at least one son of each family used to be a monk, today at least one son is in the army. The village has a Central school, and is a good producer of fruits like apples and apricots. Wheat, barley and peas are also grown. There is an ancient temple and some *chortens* probably from the eleventh century. There is a *gompa* built by Tshe-Wang Namgyal in the sixteenth century



King and Queen of Zaskar

and later, in the seventeenth century, King Singe Namgyal erected a Maitreya statue in gilded copper. The *gompa* is under the administrative control of Hemis. Beyond this strange village which seems to have been cut out of antiquity, the road starts rising abruptly, zig-zagging through a rocky mountain with purple and green slopes. After the road reaches the top, which is a plateau, it gradually drops down into the Saspol valley which has a wide expanse of fields with *chortens* and is an important religious centre. In the vicinity of Saspol, there is an ancient cave temple with well-preserved frescoes.

We returned late in the evening, although I wished I could go beyond and drive down to Lamayuru. The road leads on to Lamayuru, Kargil and beyond to Srinagar. Kargil is one of the five major regions of Ladakh and has a Muslim majority belonging to the Shia sect. It is an important sub-division district of Ladakh, situated at a strategic point between Srinagar and Leh. The border between India and Pakistan runs very close to Kargil. The other regions apart from Leh valley are: Rupshu—a high plateau in the south-east, with a sparse and scattered population. The inhabitants are nomads who seasonally migrate with their herds of goats, sheep and yaks. Zaskar—a region in south and south-west is usually called “The Lost Valley.” The word “zaskar” means “white copper.” The main towns of Zaskar are Padam and Zangla. The population is mainly Buddhist. The king of Zaskar, Nima Norbu resides in

Zangla. Zaskar is a green area—an ideal pasture ground for cattle, and is famous for its milk, butter and other milk products. The other major region is the Nubra valley in the north and north-east.

I have scaled great heights and ventured into many valleys but I cannot help being particularly enchanted by the unique charm of the valley of Leh and its surroundings. I am sure, visitors from the Western world will find a tour of this snow desert and its oasis an exotic and exhilarating experience. Every aspect about Ladakh is fascinating! What makes it more so is the aura of mystery surrounding its history.



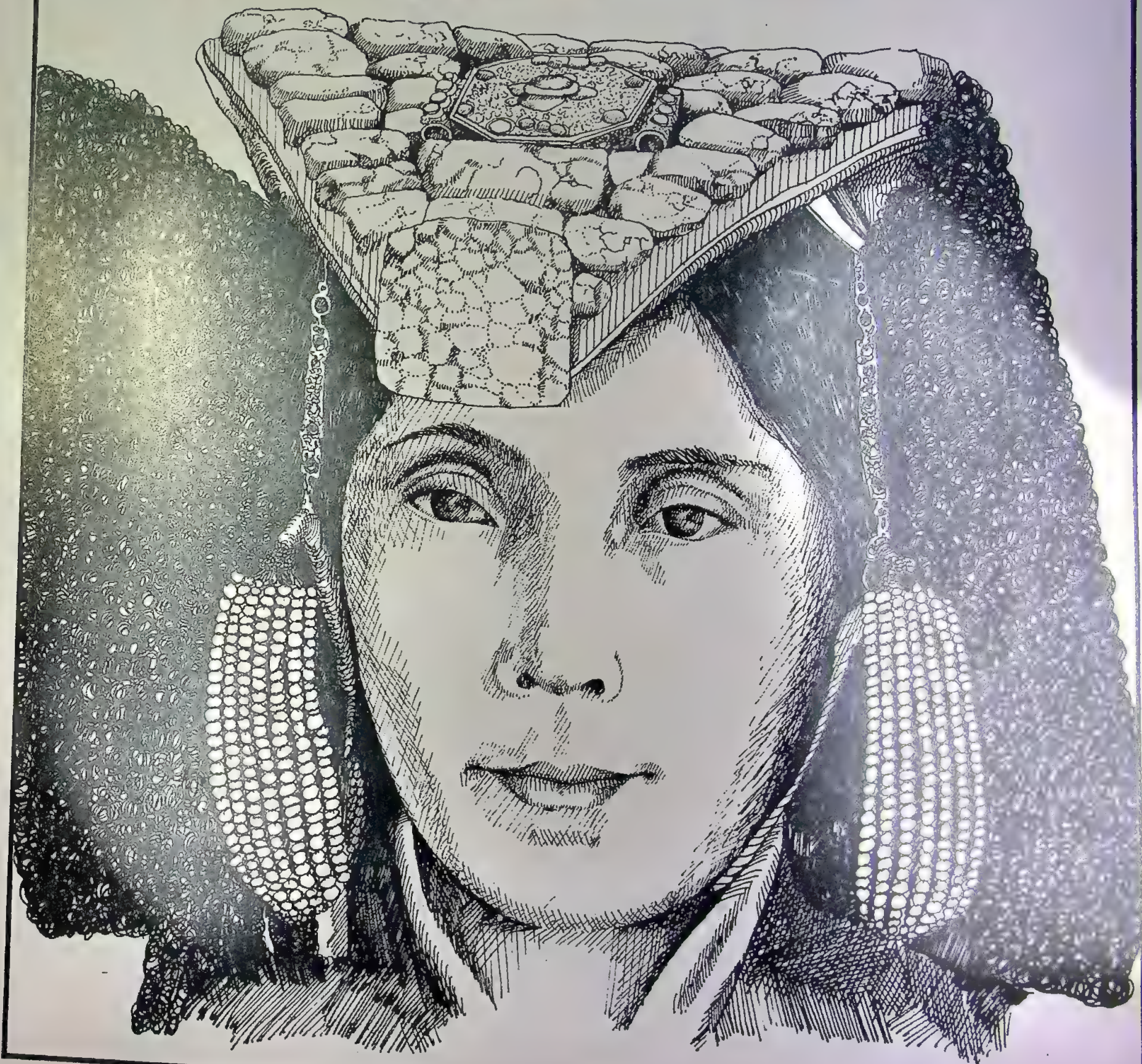
Lamayuru

The Buddha's Discourse on Friendliness:

Whatever living beings there are, either feeble or strong, all either long or great, middle-sized, short, small or large. Either seen or those not seen, and which live far or near, either born or about to be born, may all creatures be blessed with the happiness. Let no one deceive another, let him not despise another in any place, let him not out of anger or resentment wish harm to another. As a mother at the risk of her life guards her own child, her only child, so also let everyone cultivate a limitless friendly thought towards all beings. And let him cultivate goodwill towards all the world, an infinite thought of friendliness, above and below and across, unobstructed, without hatred and without enmity.

(Suttanipata, verses, 145-149)

Namgyals



تفہیم لداخ

چون دین خان فرزند عنوان بتایس دوم ماہ اسوج ۱۸۳۴ء ایان افسران لاسیکی قلون
 سوکان والہ و دویم بخشی سچو افسر افواج خاقان چین و از طرف سری مہاراج صاحب راجہ
 راجگان راجہ صاحب بہادر راجہ گلاب سنگہ جی دو افسر کیے صاحب مختار والدہ دیوان
 سری چند و دویم و درت پناہ وزیر رمون در مجلس صلح و عہد پیمان باتفاق ہمگزشتہ
 و طرفیہ و مہوش شدہ دوستی و دو احد خانگی بصفائی باطنی جانین و تقاسم قلم تے قونخ صاحب
 یاد کردہ چنین قرار داد مقرر شدہ کہ رابطہ صلح و مصالح و دو احد خانگی سری مہاراج صاحب بہادر
 راجا گلاب سنگہ جی و خاقان چین و لاسہ گور و صاحب لاسہ والدہ از روی صفائی باطنی ابتداء
 حال تا ابد الدہر استحکم و مربوط خواهد بود و بجنہ قونخ صاحب بوجہی من الرجوع عدل و فرق و
 قصور نخواہد شد و آنچه کہ حد و دملک لدخ مع اطراف از قدیم الایام مقرر است ہمراہ آن گاہی
 واسطہ و غرض صلاً و مطلقاً نیست و نخواہم کرد و اجرائے پشم شال و چائی و جب آئین قدیم
 بسال از راہ لدخ خواہم ساخت و اگر کسی از مخالفان سری راجا صاحب بہادر و اطراف
 و ملکہائے میان وارد شود و سخنیائے مخالفان مذکورہ را پذیرائے نمی کنم و مشارالہ ناماد ملک
 خود جائی نمیدہم و آنکہ سوداگران لدخ در اطرفہائے امی آیند آہانرا مزاحمت نخواہد شد
 و اینکہ در صدر قرار داد محکم و دوستی و دو احد خانگی و مقرر می حد و دملک لدخ و جاری
 گذاشتن راہ پشم شال و چائی نوشتہ بادیم سرنوی خلاف نمی سازیم برین مہد قول
 قونخ صاحب و کاتری و پی و ژوہ میان و خوشحال چوہ گواہ اند تحریر عہد نامہ دویم ماہ

اسوج ۱۸۳۴ء

The Queen of Ladakh is a strikingly beautiful woman. Called Gyalmo by her people and Rani Sahiba by outsiders, she could be a fashion designer's delight as she sits in regal splendour in her old palace at Stok. Her stunning sky-blue turquoise head-dress, ruby rings, pearl necklaces and other ornaments studded with dazzling diamonds enhance her elegance and dignity. Tourists flock to see this slim and fair complexioned woman, whose smile is like sunshine in this snow-bound region. The daughter of a *thakur* of Lahaul, a rich landlord of north Himachal Pradesh, Deskit Wangmo became the Gyalmo when she married Kunzang Namgyal in Stok. After he died of cancer at the age of fifty, few years ago, she was elected in 1977, to the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) from Ladakh, India's largest district with the smallest population of 105,291 people living in 239 villages.

As she speaks softly in Hindustani, one discerns that she accepts the turns and twists in her life with the philosophical attitude that is typical of the hill folk of north India: there is a job to be done and the joy is in doing it well. One can hardly tell her age. Indeed, one is mildly startled when she tells that she has a twenty-two-year old daughter, the eldest of four children. She recalls shyly how she came as a bride to Leh in 1950, leaving the relative warmth of her home in Lahaul. Her father, Thakur Abhechand alias Hime Wangyal, owned vast acres of land and apple orchards and wielded considerable influence. "I was married in Ladakh to Kunzang Namgyal, the son of Gyalpo Jigmed Dadul Namgyal, who was the seventy-third generation of the family to rule Ladakh," says the Gyalmo.

Those who were present at the royal wedding recall the elaborate arrangements and the splendour that accompanied it. S.S. Gergan, a former chief game warden of Jammu and Kashmir and now a noted scholar on Ladakh, told me how he was among the 500 horsemen who had trotted some sixteen kilometres out of Leh to receive the bride. Kunzang's uncle, Tsetan Phuntsog (Kalon) of Shey Zimshag, was the Ladakh aristocracy's representative to



Kunzang Namgyal,
seventy-third generation of the rulers of Ladakh.



S.S. Gergan

have gone all the way to Lahaul to escort Deskit Wangmo to her new home. Kunzang's mother, belonged to Lahaul aristocracy and as such, the relationship between Leh and Lahaul was not a new one. "A tented township had come up at the point where we were to receive Deskit who was to become our Gyalmo," recalled Gergan. In the slow march back to Leh with the Queen-designate, hundreds of villagers came out in their best clothes to offer her and members of her entourage garlands, *chang*, salt and butter, *tsampa* and white scarves. Among Ladakhis, white is considered auspicious.

"We were greeted at so many places by so many people that it took five hours to cover the sixteen kilometres to reach the gates of the Stok palace. But we were there at the time stipulated by the royal astrologer," Gergan told me. Kunzang's mother performed certain rituals at the gate, a kind of welcome ceremony, and then escorted her to the throne where sat the Namgyal. An interesting feature of this palace wedding is that the bridegroom—the King continues to sit on his throne and it is the Queen-bride who approaches him. The King was dressed up for the big occasion and sat in his resplendent regalia. Even though there was enough visual diversion with all of Ladakh's aristocracy present in their rich costumes and ornaments, all eyes were on Kunzang and his bride. The wedding ceremony took place in the assembly hall of the palace. Merry-making by way of music, dance, feasting and drinking continued for four days. Three massive *pagoda*-shaped cakes attracted everyone's attention. While one of the three-tiered cakes was presented on behalf of the people, the second had been gifted by the Hemis *gompa*. The palace had provided the third cake.

Leafing through an ancient-looking little diary, that contained details of the Namgyal family-tree written beautifully in Urdu, she talked about the contributions of her husband's predecessors who ruled Ladakh. Some had excelled as builders of palaces and monasteries, while others had given considerably to the growth of religion and culture. Gyalmo's voice was emotional when she talked about her husband, whom she lost in 1975. A great warrior and horseman and the descendant of the Namgyal kings, Kunzang represented the transition between the ancient tradition of great chieftains and the modern arm-chair rulers. Kunzang Namgyal's biggest contribution was the establishment of the Ladakh Scouts, and motivating others to join this fighting force. "Even though the people of Ladakh were quite battle weary, they responded to his call out of love and devotion for him," said the Gyalmo.

During the early days of the establishment of the Ladakh Scouts, when it was passing through a difficult phase, Kunzang distributed rations to the recruits from his own stocks and also underwent considerable hardship and suffering with his men. Kunzang would have been extremely happy if he had lived to see the Ladakh Scouts winning not only on the battle-front but also in the sports arena. Leh is one of those rare places, that can boast of having an ice-hockey field at the highest altitude in the world. And the annual ice-hockey championship, an event that turns into a mini-festival with hundreds of Ladakhi men, women and children dressed in their best. Invariably, the Ladakh Scouts win the trophy and show their skill and courage in the action-packed game that sends spectators into repeated bursts of applause and squeals of delight.

The Gyalmo mentioned indirectly, due to her innate modesty that she too contributed to the development of the Ladakh Scouts by encouraging her late husband to spend a great deal of his time, wealth and energy to build up this fighting force. In their twenty-five years of marriage, she bore him two daughters and two sons. The elder of the two daughters, Jigme Angmu, is married. The younger one, Jigme Rinchen is a student of Indraprastha College in Delhi. "My elder son, twelve-year old Jigmed Namgyal, represents the seventy-fourth generation of the Namgyals of Ladakh," she points out. The "Prince," as most Ladakhis



Hemis, the most important monastery of Ladakh.





Threshing



The learned ones.

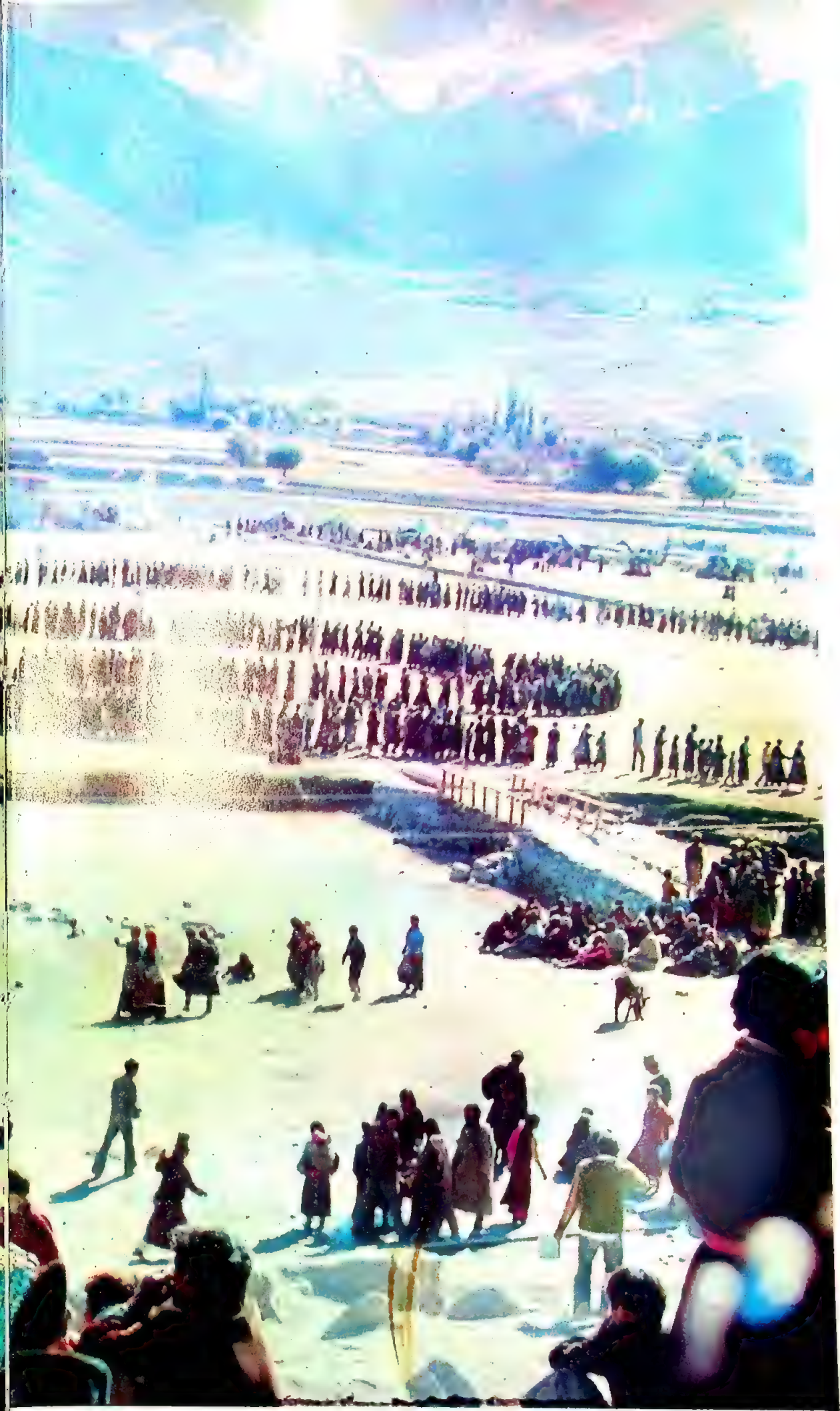


dances in progress in the main Hemis courtyard.



Lama dance





Serpentine que at the Kalacakra ceremony in Leh.



His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.

accept him, is a student of Modern School, Delhi, studying in the fifth standard. His younger brother, eight-year old Karma Konchog Namgyal also studies in the same school. One cannot but help contrast the situations in which a younger prince of yore must have been concentrating on learning to ride a horse and go into battle against the invading hordes that thundered across the bleak and barren terrain while the present-day prince can watch movies, enjoy the thrill of jets flying past and listen to Test match commentaries.

But change is the law of nature. And change has affected the Gyalmo too. She cannot afford to preside over the Namgyal's kingdom of Ladakh, sitting in a dilapidated palace there. But she enjoys the privilege of representing her region and her people in the highest forum in a parliamentary democracy.

The Gyalmo, fully conscious of the turbulent history of Ladakh and of the colossal challenges posed by climate and communication in the development of this remote region, strives to do her best for her people. She is aware that in spite of the Indus river flowing past Leh and large parts of Ladakh, water is scarce. Tuberculosis, skin diseases and other health problems are widespread. On the language front, Ladakhi has yet to be given a proper status among the languages of the Indian Union.

Throwing Ladakh open to tourism, has brought in corruption in a big way. The modern "invaders" smuggle out invaluable antiques from the various *gompas* for fancy prices in Western markets. Even the inscribed stone slabs, gift offerings by devotees to propitiate the gods, which are used to build the boundary walls around each *gompa*, are not spared by the plunderers of Ladakh's cultural and religious heritage. One of the deepest regrets of Gyalmo is apparently the theft of Ladakh's history written in the Tibetan language. The theft took place about fifty years ago. "Only hotels and taxi owners are prospering with the tourist boom in Ladakh. But at what cost?" asked a concerned Gyalmo. "Prices have shot up and the local people don't like it at all," she explained.

The early history of Ladakh is still a mystery. Researching into the history of Ladakh is like attempting a task far more complex than a Chinese jigsaw puzzle. One can put different pieces together with some skill and imagination. But what does one do when the pieces of the puzzle themselves are missing, hurling long periods of several hundred years at a stretch into oblivion? Due to its location, Ladakh faced invasion from all sides. The first Moghul campaign came from the north, led by Mirza Haider Beg. He came from Central Asia, conquered Ladakh and Baltistan and pressed into Kashmir. Ladakh was under suzerainty of Kashmir and later of Delhi during the reign of the Moghuls. It also faced occasional invasions from Tibet. In the mid-nineteenth century, Ladakh was invaded by the army of Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu via Kishtwar and was later incorporated in the Dogra kingdom. Just to ensure that we are not lost in the maze of known history and the gaps unknown, I would say at this stage that the latter history of Ladakh can broadly be divided into three major periods: (i) the Namgyal rule, (ii) the Dogra invasion and (iii) Post-independence developments.

One of the main reasons for the areas of darkness in Ladakh's early history is the failure of the Ladakhi monarchs to engage official chroniclers. Lamas were given the task of chronicling events, but they cannot really be blamed for not looking beyond their noses. Their interest, limited as it was, was confined to taking notes of religious gifts and the construction of *gompas* and other structures. To a serious student of Ladakh's history, the notings of those lamas are of little value as they can hardly be used for the exact dating of historical events. The lack of a tradition of writing events as they took place then undoubtedly contributes to the general impossibility of drawing up an unbroken chronological order. No authentic records up to the seventh century are available. Of course, there are theories galore to substantiate the fact,

which need not really be disputed at all, that Ladakh served as a crucible for the cross-currents of cultures, religions, races and languages to ferment, fertilize, flourish and even fade away with passage of time, depending on their popular assimilation with the local people. It is not until the first half of the tenth century that the chronicles of Ladakh can be deemed to have any historical value. We are on fairly firm ground from 900 AD when Skid-Ide-Nima-Gon, a prince of Tibetan dynasty, is reported to have fled from Tibet with hundred followers and established reign within a short period of time. Ladakh kept close contacts with Tibet till the thirteenth century.

The first history of Tibet was written during the reign of King Mu-tri-tsan-po (Mu-khri-btsan-po) in 798-804 AD. In the seventh century, Tibet became a dominant military power and by the eighth century had risen to its zenith, only to disintegrate in the beginning of the ninth century. Delving into the history of Ladakh inevitably confronts one with exotic names of people and places often difficult to pronounce, for instance, gNa-ris-skor-sum, Boza-Khar-Skyong, Ide-tsug-Gon, Mu-tri-tsan-po or Skid-Ide-Nima-Gon.

Pre-Namgyal Period

Before we enter into a discussion of the highlights of the Namgyal rule, it would be educative to peep into the period that preceded it. For one of the most significant features of this pre-Namgyal period is the establishment of Ladakh as an empire.

Historians blame the two quarrelsome half-brothers, sons of Glang-dar-ma, for the breakup of Tibet into small independent states. Glang-dar-ma, the last king of Central Tibet, was assassinated in 842 AD during widespread internal crisis in his kingdom. According to Gergan, during this period of instability, King Skid-Ide-Nima-Gon, the great-grandson of Glang-dar-ma, fled with hundred horsemen from Central Tibet to gNa-ris-skor-sum (Greater Ladakh) and took refuge under the ruler, Ge-Shes-Tsan at Purang. Skid-Ide-Nima-Gon married Princess Boza-Khar-Skyong, daughter of his patron and settled down in Purang. With the help of his men, he consolidated the kingdom of his father-in-law by subduing the rebels and constructing forts at strategic points. He conquered large areas in the western regions which also included Ladakh. From Princess Boza-Khar-Skyong he had three sons: Spal-gi-Gon, Tashi-Gon, and Ide-tsug-Gon, among whom the kingdom was divided after his death. The early historical records of this period are vague and the division of his kingdom among his sons is referred to in *Chronicles of Ladakh*. The eldest son, Spal-gi-Gon, was given the present Ladakh from Demchog to Sonamarg. Tashi-Gon received Gu-ge and Purang. The youngest, Ide-tsug-Gon received Spiti, Lahaul and Zaskar areas.

Tibet was still in a turmoil. Lang-dar-ma, half-brother of Skid-Ide-Nima-Gon, came to the throne as forty-first king of Tibet in 901 AD. He was a staunch Bon-po, and all his powerful Bon-po ministers tried their best to wipe off Buddhism from the map of Tibet. Monks were forced to become butchers or fishermen and compelled to take wives. Buddhist books and monasteries were destroyed. He was considered an evil ruler and was assassinated by dedicated monk, La-Lung Pal-gyi-De-je (Lha-lung d Pal-gyi-rdo-rje). The state of persecution continued for more than seventy years. The monks fled or went underground.

Ladakh did not constitute an integral part of the Tibetan State and remained outside the territorial and ecclesiastical organization of the Tibetan king, Lang-dar-ma, his Bon-po ministers and Bon religion. Although Buddhist laity and lamas in the kingdom of Skid-Ide-Nima-Gon were not affected, *tantric* (Hindu) influence and Bonism corrupted Buddhism in this part of the country. Sex practice for mystical realization (Lam-Bras) is illustrative of this corruption. After Skid-Ide-Nima-Gon, there is a mention of his grandson,

who played an important role in the revival and reformation of Mahayanic Buddhism in Tibet and Central Asia. He later retired and became a lama, taking the religious name of Lama-Yeshes Od. He made up his mind to reform the church and re-establish strict monastic discipline. He was also responsible for sending twenty-one young men to Kashmir for education, and inviting Atisha Dimpamkara Sri-Jnana from Nalanda around the eleventh century. Out of the twenty-one scholars, Rinchen Zangpo showed tremendous creative capabilities. It is believed that Rinchen Zangpo constructed 108 *gompas* and *chortens*. Most important surviving *gompas* of Rinchen Zangpo are Alchi in Ladakh and Tabo in Lahaul. The other remnants of his temples are found in Leh, Basgo, Naris, Spiti, Tholing and Purang valley.

During the eleventh century, Utpala, who reigned in Ladakh from 1080 to 1110 AD, was the first of several powerful Ladakhi kings to capture the surrounding territories. He extended his kingdom south and south-east along the Himalayas conquering Zaskar and Purang close to Mustang. He is said to have founded Likir monastery. From twelfth to fourteenth century there are not enough records and the chronicles are vague. There is however, a mention of King Tashigong of Gu-ge who ruled this area from 1200 AD to 1230 AD and it is understood, according to a Mongolian chronicle, that he recognized the sovereignty of Genghiz Khan. It is also significant to note the developments in the surrounding areas. The Mongols concentrated their rule over Tibet proper through lamas. Ladakh's fate was tied more closely to Kashmir and Turkistan than Central Tibet, even though the Ladakhi society retained its Tibetan-Buddhist character.

Namgyal Rule

The year 1533 AD is notable for the Namgyals, a branch of the royal family, who came to power in Ladakh and made Leh the capital. The first well-known Namgyal king was Tashi Namgyal, son of Bhagan, as is evident from the inscriptions found in the ruins of an ancient monastery and fort at Alchi, a village in Lower Ladakh on the southern bank of the Indus.

Tshe-Wang-Namgyal, the eldest son of Tashi Namgyal built a reputation for himself by virtue of constructing the first fortified palace which is now a *gompa*, and extending his kingdom into Baltistan in the west and to Gu-ge in the east. He repulsed attacks by the hordes of Mirza Haider who had established himself as the king of Kashmir around 1540 AD. Tshe-Wang-Namgyal died in 1575 AD without having any children and was therefore succeeded by one of his younger brothers, Jamyang Namgyal.

If I were to relate Ladakh's history to one single structure that no visitor to Leh can miss, it would be the imposing fort-like palace, rising into the sky as it were, which bears great architectural resemblance to the Potala palace in Lhasa. This dominating Leh palace was built by Singe Namgyal in the first half of the seventeenth century. He was the most outstanding and successful among the Namgyal rulers, known for his prowess as a warrior and builder. He also introduced the copying of manuscripts in gold, silver and copper letterings and his works ran into a large number of volumes, some of which are still preserved at the Basgo temples. He erected *chortens* and prayer walls. Singe Namgyal's father, Jamyang Namgyal, married the daughter of Ali Mir, a Khan of Skardu, who defeated Jamyang in battle and imprisoned him. Ali Mir later released him for political reasons, mainly to gain the sympathy of the people of Ladakh; he brought about the marriage. Ladakh celebrated Jamyang's release. He later constructed temples and monasteries and procured new copies of sacred books.

Jamyang's Muslim wife bore him two sons; one of whom was Singe Namgyal and the other Norbu Namgyal. Jamyang also had two sons from his senior Buddhist wife. He was

succeeded by the energetic Singe Namgyal in 1594. Remarkably enough, despite Islamic pressures, the Ladakhis held on perseveringly and stubbornly to their religion. Singe Namgyal began his reign by military successes in occupying surrounding districts. In the process, he brought back cattle, cash and other property from the *zamindars* (landlords).

It was Singe Namgyal who repelled the attack launched by Ahmed Khan, Chief of Baltistan, with the assistance of the Moghul Emperor, Jahangir. Spurred by his great victory, Singe returned to the capital city to subdue and capture rebellious chiefs of Rudok and decided to take on Lhasa. Half-way between Leh and Lhasa, Singe Namgyal was met by a deputation of people from Lhasa. They made friendly overtures to him and presented him with several mule-loads of gold, silver and other precious gifts. He accepted the gifts and called off the attack on Lhasa.

I would interpret Singe Namgyal's intended attack on Tibet as a demonstration of his military strength to the then Dalai Lama who was widely suspected of harbouring plans to annex the fabulously rich gold-producing area of gNa-ris-skor-sum in Ladakh.

Singe Namgyal had five sons. On the advice of lamas, he divided his dominion amongst his sons. He gave Ladakh to his eldest son, Deldan Namgyal, before he died in a military engagement against the King of Tsang in 1645. Deldan was a great one for religion and quickly built several monasteries. One of the most outstanding structure to his credit is the Shey palace. Deldan emulated his illustrious father and installed a huge statue of Buddha, two-storeys high, plated with copper and gold in Shey. In his thirty-year rule over Ladakh, Deldan Namgyal crushed a number of rebellions but was vanquished by the Moghul governor of Kashmir, who attacked Ladakh at the instance of the Mir of Skardu. Deldan was imprisoned but released on condition that he should become a Muslim and build a mosque at Leh. He did the needful and built the mosque around 1666 AD. As surety for the fulfilment of promises be made, the Moghuls took with them one of his sons, Jigdal, to Kashmir. The eldest son, Delegs Namgyal became Deldan's successor in 1675 AD. It was during Delegs' rule that the fifth Dalai Lama sent large forces of Mongols and Tibetans to annex the gold-bearing area of gNa-ris-skor-sum. The invaders succeeded in their mission and Ladakh shrank to its present size and no longer wielded the power it did earlier.

Delegs had not only problems in handling his kingdom but also with his wife, the princess of Lho-Man-Thang, whom he was forced to divorce fairly soon after marriage. He married again and his second wife bore him children. It is said about Delegs that he fled incognito to Kashmir and became a Muslim, taking the name of Agbet Mohammed Khan. Delegs' son, Nima Namgyal, succeeded him and during his rule from 1705-34, established peace and order and emerged as a patron of arts and letters. A notable contribution by Nima was the setting up of a paper factory and the introduction of hand printing. While Delegs built a huge *stupa* and temples at Zaskar in memory of his father, Nima built the palace at Nubra.

After this flurry of combat and creativity, a period of decadence from 1750 to 1834 set in, when mediocre kings ruled Ladakh which was then surrounded by stronger neighbours. Having lost its cattle-pastures and gold-bearing areas, Ladakh became poorer and weaker and lost its fame as a centre of trade and commerce. Every successive king of Ladakh had to declare himself a Muslim and pay tribute to the Moghul rulers. The nominal allegiance to Kashmir was retained as were the commercial and cultural ties with western Tibet. These steps helped Ladakh maintain its independence notwithstanding internal conflicts and one can imagine the sigh of relief that Ladakh must have heaved when the Moghul empire disintegrated towards the end of the eighteenth century.

Hardly did Ladakh feel free of all troubles in 1834, when it was subjected to another

invasion, this time by the Hindu Dogra rulers of Jammu, the Sikh State. The foreign invasions in Ladakh appear as running theme and demonstrate the vitality of the Buddhist religion and the psychology of the people which withstood these onslaughts. In this context, one can appreciate the deep sense of agony and anguish among the Ladakhis resulting from the over-running of Tibet by the Chinese in the late 1950s.

Dogra Invasion

We shall now go on to the Dogras. The Zorawar Fort at Leh is a reminder of the legendary General Zorawar Singh, who was assigned by Gulab Singh to conquer Ladakh in 1834 AD. Gulab Singh, who owed allegiance to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, became the ruler of Jammu in 1822 by virtue of this allegiance. He had two objectives in mind when he ordered his ablest General to take 5,000 soldiers and conquer Ladakh. First, this would give him access to the lucrative wool trade and also to the areas in West Tibet from where the wool came, to achieve a monopoly in this business. Secondly, he also wanted to win back for Ladakh the gold-bearing areas of Thok Jalung, Thok Daurakpa in western Tibet and gNa-ris-skor-sum.

Gulab Singh as well as the East India Company knew fully that Sikh power was likely to collapse after the death of Ranjit Singh. The East India Company could wait, but not Gulab Singh, who followed a shrewd policy, in consultation with the British, of conquering territories north of Punjab. Although he did this in the name of Ranjit Singh, his objective was to create a dominion for himself. Ladakh now became his major objective.



Zorawar fort, Leh.

The Ladakhis were unable to resist the Dogra attack. The disastrous defeat suffered by them compelled them to sign an agreement wherein the king of Ladakh would pay the Dogras an indemnity to Rs.50,000, partly in cash and partly in jewels, and an annual contribution of Rs.20,000. The Dogras paid Rs.30,000 to Maharaja Ranjit Singh after their conquest of Ladakh and he was quite content with their accomplishment. In 1839-40, Zorawar Singh was once again back in Ladakh.

Ahmed Shah, ruler of Baltistan, was dissatisfied with his elder son, Mohomed Shah, whom he disinherited and instead bestowed his favours on his other son, Mohomed Ali. Mohomed Shah fled to Zorawar Singh. But Ahmed Shah's troops managed to seize Mohomed Shah from Zorawar Singh's protection and took him back to Baltistan. The Dogras demanded the immediate release of Mohomed Shah. When this was refused, it gave Zorawar Singh an excuse to invade and capture Baltistan in 1840 and release Mohomed Shah. Thus, by 1840, the Dogras had firmly established their control over the region and were ready for fresh conquest. Elated by the success, Zorawar Singh, Military Governor of Ladakh and Gulab Singh's foremost Commander, advanced towards Tibet.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh died in 1839 AD. Everything was in a turmoil at that time. The Sikhs were involved in internal dissensions. The British were pre-occupied as trouble had occurred in Afghanistan and Burma. In Tibet too, there was trouble as a result of power struggle between the regent of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan ministers. Thus, it was the most favourable time for the Dogras to advance to Tibet. The British did not raise any objection to it. Zorawar Singh threatened to invade Yarkand and the province of Rudok as well. He had his eyes on the treasures of the monasteries on the way, which he was told were full of gold, silver and other valuable articles. He was also aware that the country produced the finest shawl-wool, which was another attraction. The shawl-wool trade would go into the hands of his master while the gold and other valuables would be for himself and his soldiers.

In 1841, with an army of 5,000 men, he advanced up the valley of the Indus and looted almost all the monasteries en route. He then established his headquarters near Mount Kailash. Dogra forces were divided into three divisions. One moved up the Indus valley towards Tashigong, another to Rupshu via Spiti and the third to Rudok. The first two contingents plundered all the monasteries. The third captured Rudok.

Zorawar Singh then announced his intention, in the name of the king of Jammu, Gulab Singh, to conquer all of Tibet west of Mayum pass on the plea that this territory originally belonged to Ladakh. He advanced along the old caravan route and one of his contingents under Captain Basti Ram reached Taklakot on the western extreme of the Nepal-Tibet border. The Tibetans were alarmed. They moved to oppose him near Taklakot but failed to halt his advance. Zorawar Singh continued his march and threatened to take Lhasa. It was winter then and the Dogras were unwilling to withdraw. Mayum pass was blocked by snow but the Tibetans made a by-pass and captured Taklakot from Zorawar Singh's forces after severe fighting. The Tibetans then sent a detachment forward to cut off the Dogra communications.

When Zorawar Singh came to know of this reverse, he led his army back for the recapture of Taklakot. Severe fighting took place, lasting almost three weeks. The Tibetans, helped by a heavy snow-fall, attacked the Dogra forces. Zorawar Singh himself was shot in the thigh. This demoralized his forces and in the confusion that set in the ranks, 600 men surrendered as prisoners. General Zorawar Singh's troops were at a great disadvantage as the battle took place at an altitude of over 4,500 metres above sea-level in the freezing cold. Their bodies became numb and frost-bitten. Since Zorawar was a great warrior, the Tibetans felt that he had some super-natural powers and believed that an ordinary bullet could not penetrate his body. As the



Wa-zir Zo-ra-war Singh

legend goes, he was shot with a golden bullet. After he fell, the Tibetans feared that he might escape and to make doubly sure that he did not, they speared him repeatedly. Later, a structure was erected on his remains in order to subdue his spirit as the Tibetans were afraid that the spirit of the great warrior might harm Tibet. His first death centenary was celebrated at Taklakot which was attended by a number of pilgrims who were there on their visit to the sacred Lake Mansarovar and Mount Kailash. Also during these celebrations the Tibetans displayed the General's armour shield and other weapons.

The Tibetan forces recaptured all the areas which were taken by Zorawar Singh. After that they wanted to free Ladakh from Dogra rule and fighting began with the Leh garrison. Dewan Hari Chand and Wazir Ratan, two prominent Dogra officials arrived with a huge army and several guns to aid the Dogra garrison at Leh. The Tibetans then retreated along the Indus river trade route. They set up their camp at Tangtse. The Dogras also set up their camp just a few kilometres away in the area. A severe battle was fought at Chushul, where the Tibetans were defeated. In the terms of the treaty negotiated after the battle, all the area on the Tibetan side of the border remained in Tibet and the ancient Ladakhi claim to West Tibet was dropped. Thus the Tibetans accepted Dogras as the rulers of Ladakh. Ladakh's king and their families were given the right to reside peacefully in Ladakh.

Thereafter, the situation in Ladakh remained stable, but there was a critical development in Turkistan. The situation there became very grave around 1860 and the Chinese rule in eastern Turkistan collapsed. Around 1867 AD, a Kokandi official, Yakub Beg managed to acquire firm control over Chinese Turkistan. He established good relations with the British and the Russians who opened their trade missions in Yarkand and wanted to keep the area as a buffer state.

In 1877, Yakub Beg died. The Chinese recaptured the area, although this did not affect the trade. This area and Hunza continued to be disturbed. On the Tibetan side, the Chinese kept moving into Tibet. The Dalai Lama requested help from the British and also the Czar of Russia, but none came to his rescue. The Chinese continued their advance. This led to the flight of Dalai Lama to Sikkim in 1911. Due to the outbreak of revolution in China, there was complete chaos and the Tibetans, taking advantage of the situation, disarmed the Chinese and drove them out of their territory. Although Ladakh was not involved in this conflict, it acquired a very important position as an observation post.

A most significant development occurred later when the British withdrew from India in 1947, which resulted in the partition of India and the emergence of Pakistan.

Post-Independence Developments

On 26 October 1947 Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu and Kashmir signed a note of accession to the Governor General of India, which was accepted. With this formal accession, Ladakh became a part of the Indian Union on 27 October 1947.

After independence, a crisis developed in the princely State of Jammu and Kashmir. The State had a Muslim majority in Kashmir with a preponderance of Hindus and Sikhs in Jammu and a majority of Buddhists in Ladakh. Pakistani invaders from the north started attacking Jammu and Kashmir. The Maharaja and the Kashmiri Muslims appealed for assistance to the Government in driving back the invaders.

But in the meantime, Gilgit Scouts of the Pakistani armed forces turned to Baltistan and Ladakh. In order to circumvent the Indian armed forces, the Gilgit Scouts with the help of the Pakistani forces took Skardu, the leading town in Baltistan. The Pakistani forces also captured an ancient fort of Basgo. They were however, driven out by an Indian "Commando-Style" raid on their heavy artillery which the Pakistanis had brought to Basgo. Pakistani invaders are ill remembered today in Basgo as they had shot a number of local villagers who offered resistance. In fact the position where they had kept their artillery guns is today a tourist attraction. Nubra valley was also threatened by Pakistani forces. But a seventeen-year old Nubra guard undergoing military training in the garrison at Leh could not bear the thought of Pakistan taking away his beautiful valley. The patriotic teenager, now a senior officer, recalled how he had rushed to the garrison officer and requested him for some arms and ammunition to save his land from the intruders.

"I was given thirty rifles and a sufficient quantity of ammunition. I loaded them on mules and walked for three days to reach the Nubra valley," Major Rinchen told me. The youngster could not bear the sound of firing by the advancing Pakistani forces. His parents, relatives and friends in Nubra were in a state of panic. They had packed their belongings and were ready to leave the valley. "I persuaded them that with the arms and ammunition, we would be able to save Nubra. Of the 300 volunteers, thirty knew how to use the arms. The others used country-made weapons like spears and axes." Major Rinchen explained. "We then dug a defensive position at the entrance of the Nubra valley. We certainly surprised the Pakistanis by fiercely countering their attack and repelling them in a long-drawn battle," he said.

During the months of fighting, all the Nubra valley families provided the required food, clothing and other help and kept the fighting-machinery intact. With the Indian Army providing some reinforcements, the Nubra valley was at last saved. For this gallant action, Major Rinchen was awarded one of the highest military honours of the Indian Army.

A few weeks after capturing Skardu, the Pakistani forces captured Kargil and cut off Ladakh from Kashmir. As the Pakistanis began converging on to Leh, an urgent appeal for

help was made to the Indian Army. The Ladakhis built a small air-strip at Leh to enable Indian troops to land. This prompt action saved Leh from Pakistani forces. The Indian Army broke through the enemy lines near Zoji La and recaptured Kargil to re-establish Ladakh's link with Kashmir.

By 1950 the centre of interest in the Himalayas again shifted to Tibet, when claims were openly made by the Chinese for suzerainty over Tibet after almost four decades. These claims by China were followed by an invasion which was launched on 7 October 1950. The Chinese attacked several points along the eastern border of Tibet and seized major passes. Soon they were controlling the western pass also. The Dalai Lama fled with other members of his government to Yatung in Sikkim. Subsequently, an agreement was signed in Peking in May 1951, by which the Chinese granted the Tibetans regional autonomy and religious freedom. This resulted in Dalai Lama's return to Lhasa in August 1951. Little did he realize that he would have to flee from Lhasa after eight years.

A road-building project was undertaken and soon China was linked to Lhasa by road. In December 1954, the first motor convoy reached Lhasa from Peking. On the other side, the desert areas of West Tibet were linked with Sinkiang. As a result of these events, the Ladakhi merchants and monks who could earlier travel or live freely in Tibet began to face difficulties because of the restrictions imposed by the Chinese in Tibet. Soon, their entire movement stopped. In Sinkiang, the Indian consulate was closed because of the restrictive policy adopted by the Chinese. With this, the centuries-old trade that the Ladakhis had with Central Asia came to a halt. It was also at this time that the Chinese constructed a road from Yarkand through West Tibet across the north-eastern corners of Ladakh. Notwithstanding the disturbed condition in Tibet at the time, the Dalai Lama came to India in 1956 to attend the anniversary of Buddhist Purnirvana, the 2500th anniversary of the birth of Lord Buddha. He hoped that during his visit, he would be able to get some help from India. He met the Indian prime minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Chinese premier, Chou-En lai who promised all help. But on his return to Lhasa, he found the situation deteriorating. Disturbances had begun in all the provinces. There were reports of clashes between the Chinese and the Tibetans in which the monks had also started taking part. Guerrilla activities began and started spreading towards Lhasa. There was shortage of food and the prices rose very high. China launched a large-scale campaign against the rebels who were inflicting considerable losses on the Chinese army. The situation became explosive and the Dalai Lama took shelter in the Norbu-Lingka, his summer palace. It was now clear that the whole of Tibet would be overrun by the Chinese and the Dalai Lama was urged to flee from the country. With about a hundred followers he left Tibet and arrived in India on 18 April 1959.

Among those who accompanied the Dalai Lama was Jigme Taring, a prince from Sikkim. He and his wife, Rinchen Dolma Taring, have devoted themselves to the care and education of Tibetan refugee children in Mussoorie. Mrs Taring comes from an aristocratic Tibetan family. She is soft-spoken and has a remarkable gift of expression. Her father, who was the senior *Shap-po* (minister) in the *kashag* (council) was sent in July 1903 to Khampa-Dzong, near the Sikkimese border, to negotiate with Colonel Francis Younghusband. Again in 1904, her father signed a convention with Britain in Potala Palace on behalf of the Tibetan government.

Mrs Taring is full of stories from Tibet. Perhaps the most unforgettable event occurred, when she became homeless and had to leave all her grandchildren in Lhasa amidst turmoil and bloodshed. She narrated the events to me which she has recounted in her autobiography, *Daughter of Tibet*: "On 16 March, 1959 I was in Lhasa and was summoned to Norbu-Lingka, the summer palace of the Dalai Lama about two miles outside the city, to report to Tsering

Dolma on the women's activities. It is heartbreaking to think now of how my grandchildren asked me, 'Mola, where are you going?' 'What is happening?'—and other very sad questions that I just cannot put on paper," she said.

As she left her house with Tashi as an escort, she never guessed that these were her last few moments in her own home. Nobody knew what to do. Whether to stay in Lhasa or try to escape. Mrs Taring could not return the same evening from Norbu-Lingka. Next morning she tried to go home but it was dangerous to do so as the firing had already begun. She could not get the children out. The situation had become worse with artillery bombardment all over the place. Her life was in danger. With the help of Tashi, she began her dangerous mission of trying to escape from Tibet leaving her helpless grandchildren behind. Her husband Jigme Taring, without her knowledge, had already left Lhasa with the Dalai Lama.

While the Chinese outwardly showed friendly gestures towards India, they were secretly harbouring a desire to seize part of Ladakh. Clandestinely they built the road on Chang-Chen-mo and Ling-Zhi-thang (Aksai-Chin, a Turki word meaning white plateau) connecting Sinkiang and Tibet. Around 1959, the Chinese intrusions into the area became more aggressive. China was preparing for a massive attack. A new chapter was added to the history in 1962 when Chinese launched an attack on Ladakh and North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) to enforce its territorial claim.

It was during the third week of October in 1962, when the Chinese mounted a massive attack on all the Indian posts from Daulat Beg Oldi at the Karakoram to Dechog in the east. The Chip Chap river, Chushul and the areas around the Pangong lake were also attacked. The Chinese in spite of their persistent attacks were unable to capture the airfield at Chushul. On 20 November, the Chinese ceased-fire and announced their withdrawal from the area, which they had forcibly occupied. But they have not vacated the Indian territory till today including Chang-Chen-mo and Ling-Zhi-thang (Aksai Chin).

The Chinese also made a similar attack at NEFA. In January 1965, just before I left for Mount Everest, I went on a special assignment which involved training young officers in basic mountaineering, and to make them accustomed to high altitude effects. I was given five instructors and led the team to the Eastern Himalayas. This was a fascinating trip which took me to the Assam-Sikkim Himalayas, right up to the Indo-Burma border. Among the places I visited in NEFA was Sela pass. Situated at a height of approximately 5,000 metres, the pass connects Tezpur with Twang and Bum La on the Indo-Tibet border. The road to Sela passes through the beautiful Tenga valley which was one of the battlefields during the Chinese invasion of India in 1962, and at the time of my visit, was still littered with grim remnants of the war. As we drove along, we came across a number of wrecked tanks—some precariously balanced on the edge of the road—as also mortars, rockets and grenades, many possibly unexploded.

As we stayed for the night at the top of Sela pass, I had plenty of time to explore the surrounding area. The two lakes on the pass were frozen as it was mid-winter. Luckily, I had in my group some young officers, who knew about the mines. We saw heaps of empty cartridges and a number of unexploded bombs and rockets, one site had obviously been an officer's mess at the time of the invasion. I picked up a torn mess register and helmets riddled with bullets. What had been the fate of the wearers of those helmets, I wondered. On the other side, towards the end of this road somewhere near Bum La, my uncle, Colonel Ahluwalia, who was commanding a battalion there, had fought the Chinese. Overwhelmed by a much larger force and the enemy's superior fire power, he had fought gallantly but was severely wounded and taken prisoner. He was treated well by the Chinese and released after the war ended. The Chinese took him to Lhasa and he was hospitalized in Potala palace.

Less than three years later, our northern borders were alive again. This time it was Pakistan. It sought to capture Kashmir, but like in 1947, the 1965 attempt was also unsuccessful. Surreptitiously, Pakistani infiltrators, dressed like Kashmiri shepherds, were sent with instructions to assemble in Srinagar and Gulmarg. The Pakistani plan was to capture Srinagar with the help of these infiltrators.

I had returned from Mount Everest and was at the summer camp of our mountaineering school in Sonamarg in 1965. Sonamarg is short of Dras, one of the coldest places in the world, next only to Siberia. It lies on the main axis to Leh. Before partition in 1947, Sonamarg was linked to Skardu via Dras and the lofty Zoji La. It hardly took any time for our army unit in Sonamarg to be placed under orders to ferret and finish the enemy which was infiltrating into our territory. Even the area around Sonamarg was infested with them.

Our most important mission was to keep the supply line running to Leh. The period before the onset of winter, is the time when an almost unending chain of convoys heads for Leh with food and fuel. The consequences that would befall the people of Ladakh, were too frightening to imagine, should these vital supplies not reach them. One has only to visualize the hunger and cold they would have had to suffer without food and fuel. The enemy sought to cut this line of supply. It ambushed the convoys at different places.

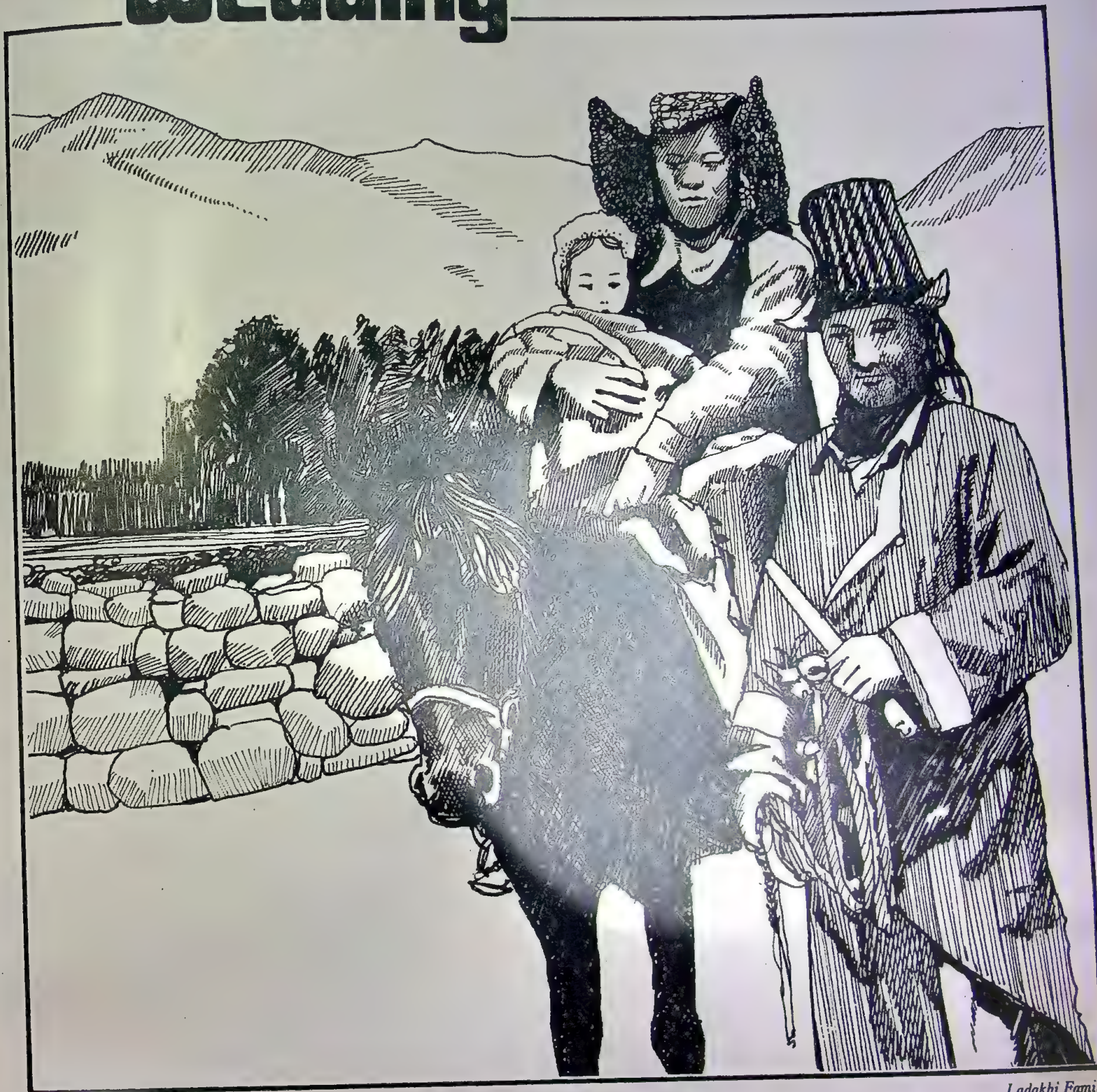


Road to Leh.

We received a report of one such ambush in which a convoy of 200 vehicles was trapped in the area under our jurisdiction. We rushed to the spot and saw that the first few vehicles were riddled with bullets while some others were in flames. After a grim battle lasting about four hours, we overpowered the infiltrators. We were returning to our base after a fairly hectic but satisfactory day. I heard a bullet shot from very close quarters. I fell down and lost consciousness. I had to spend two years in hospitals in India and in England.

At the first opportunity I decided to visit Ladakh again—the Ladakh I had sought to serve as an army officer. I had made my humble contribution by keeping the convoys moving and preventing the enemy from breaking the tenuous link with Ladakh. It is perhaps this deep personal involvement with Ladakh that has led me to learn more about the land, its people and their exciting way of living.

Ladakhi Wedding





Ladakhi women can be as feminine as any other women in the world.

Sonam and his two younger brothers live in Ganglas, the highest village in the valley. They are farmers and own agricultural land. It was threshing time when we were there. And I think it is one of the most delightful rural scenes I have ever seen, quite different from what goes on in Punjab. The peasants sing as they work, while a group of animals go round and round, treading on the crop. Several animals are tied to a central point in the field before they begin their circular motions. Usually, the smallest animal is tied nearest to the central point. It may be a small donkey, a horse, a cow or even a yak. Four or five animals, or even eight or nine at times, all abreast, are used for this purpose. The special threshing song is sung in the same manner since time immemorial. I understand the object is to keep the peasants and also the animals cheerful, eliminate fatigue and break the monotony. After the threshing is over, the Ladakhi peasants use wooden pitchforks, one or more on either side, and keep throwing the crop in the air to separate the corn from the chaff. Threshing begins early in the morning and soon the air is filled with the chanting and whistling of the special threshing song.

With the closing of the threshing season, the long winter begins and lasts for a period of four to five months, during which, the people are busy spinning and weaving the wool from sheep and goats and making it into shawls, tweed and carpets. Most of the festivals are held during this period and both men and women enjoy drinking, dancing and visiting monasteries. Sonam told me that the sowing season is heralded by a pair of black bullocks being taken in procession through the Leh Bazar after prayers, to the accompaniment of pipes and drums. After this ceremony, the peasants start ploughing their fields with the help of *dzo*, a cross between a cow and a yak. They waste no time in sowing a special variety of wheat, which ripens within three months.

Sonam later explained the irrigation system followed in the village. Utmost skill is used in taking water from small rivulets and then directing it into small channels from terrace to terrace and from field to field. The channels are dug in the hot, dry, barren land. In Ladakh, the usual method of irrigation is to collect water, drop by drop, from small rivulets and springs into a tank. Once the tank is full, the water is allowed to gush and irrigate a large piece of land. One is astonished at the ingenuity of the inhabitants of Saspol village, where an excellent system of irrigation covers the entire village, converting it into a beautiful oasis. This system of irrigation reminded me of the system followed in Yoksom, the ancient capital of Sikkim, where agriculture is also carried on in terraced fields. The villagers make use of bamboos for irrigation. Bamboos are split into half and connected in the form of open pipes which are used not only to control the flow of water, but also to channelize it from field to field.

Ladakh is India's biggest district with the smallest population—nearly three persons per square mile. Its economy is primarily agrarian and rural in character with seventy-nine per cent of its population engaged in agriculture and 92.5 per cent dwelling in rural areas. The size of land holdings is small and methods of farming fairly primitive. Sonam's house, a large two-storeyed house, was typical of a dwelling of the richer cultivator and landholder. The lower part was of stone and the upper of huge sun-dried bricks. The exterior was white-washed and the inside was finely plastered and white-washed. The projecting windows, brown wooden-glazed balconies and bay-windows are adornments that give the Ladakhi houses their characteristic look. The large rooms have ceilings of peeled poplar rafters and poplar rods and floors of a local cement called *arga*. A beauty-cum-functional feature of this house is that hay and sheafs of dry lucerne are used to border the roof upto a depth of about half a metre. This is the Ladakhi way of preserving scarce fodder from breaking and wastage.

As we were shown around the house, we were told that honoured guests were given the privilege of joining the family over tea or a meal right inside the kitchen. The Ladakhis

consider as their main living room the one which has the family hearth. They call it *Thab-La Gyamo* or the "Hearth Goddess." This is where the family sits in a semi-circle, on rugs around the central fire-place where the food is cooked. Formal guests are received in the outer living-room and not invited inside. Generally, the fire-place is made of special fire-clay and a pipe takes the smoke out. The pots and pans are neatly arranged on a long two-tier rack. Cow-dung cakes and fire-wood is used as fuel, and while some use a hollow wooden pipe to blow the fire, others use a bellow made from goat skin. Along the wall are thick mattresses topped with Tibetan carpets and a *chog-tse* (low tea-table) is placed in front for convenience.

What fascinated Bholi most, was the Ladakhi style of preserving green vegetables and meat. Vegetables, with their roots intact, are stored in the basement of the house. Here, they take root in the ground without any further growth and are kept fresh and tender throughout the winter when not a blade of grass grows in the subzero temperatures. All the housewife has to do, is to pull out a cabbage, or a turnip from this "deep freeze" and cook it. Meat is preserved by cutting it and hanging the pieces—or the carcass itself in this "deep freeze." Each big chunk is hung separately from a large wooden pole, care being taken to see that these pieces do not touch one another. The meat pieces gradually dry up and are preserved throughout the winter. Thus, even in a long, harsh winter, Sonam could pull out food from his basement like a magician pulls out a rabbit from his hat.

The average Ladakhi kitchen, however, would be a modern house-wife's nightmare. Not all the smoke goes out through the pipe provided for the purpose. Naturally, it spreads in the house which then smells of smoke even when the fire is not burning. Perhaps the locals like it as they believe that smoke keeps the house warm. This is quite similar to the Sherpa houses in the Everest region.

As I spoke to Sonam in my broken Sherpa language, which I had picked up during my Everest expedition, Bholi expressed a desire to meet his wife and also the wives of his two younger brothers. Sonam smiled at her request. He told her "We are three brothers and we share one wife." As his wife emerged from the kitchen with food for us, Bholi asked her how she felt to be a wife of three brothers. She giggled and giggled and giggled! Perhaps that was her way of answering the question. Bholi again asked her if she would have preferred to have just one husband. There was more giggling.

Sonam's wife had prepared *momos*. This is a Ladakhi delicacy made of minced meat mixed with finely chopped onions, ginger and ground spices. This mixture is allowed to marinate for four to five hours. Then it is filled in finely rolled out dough and packed to look like triangular patties or the delicious Indian *samosas*. These uncooked *momos* are then placed in containers atop a vessel containing meat soup, which is heated slowly from below. The containers are perforated at the base to allow the steam from the meat soup to pass through and cook the *momos*. After ten minutes of steaming, the *momos* are served piping-hot with special tomato and chilly sauce and meat soup. Sonam's wife prepared and served them with the finesse and aplomb of a professional Swiss chef. Bholi watched every stage of the process with great interest and curiosity and has added the *momo* recipe to her collection.

Sonam then took us upstairs through the central living-room, which has a small store on the side. He said that the wheat stored there had a high protein-calorie content and was therefore highly nutritious. It would suffice for the entire family the whole year. An average Ladakhi family is self-sufficient in its daily provisions. Except that the provisions start dwindling towards the end of the winter season and they do tighten their belts before the new crops come in. Right on the top was the prayer-room which had a small temple or chapel. The size of the temple depends on the status of the family. Those who are rich, summon monks



First reproduction of front and back covers of the Gilgit manuscript, 5th century A.D.

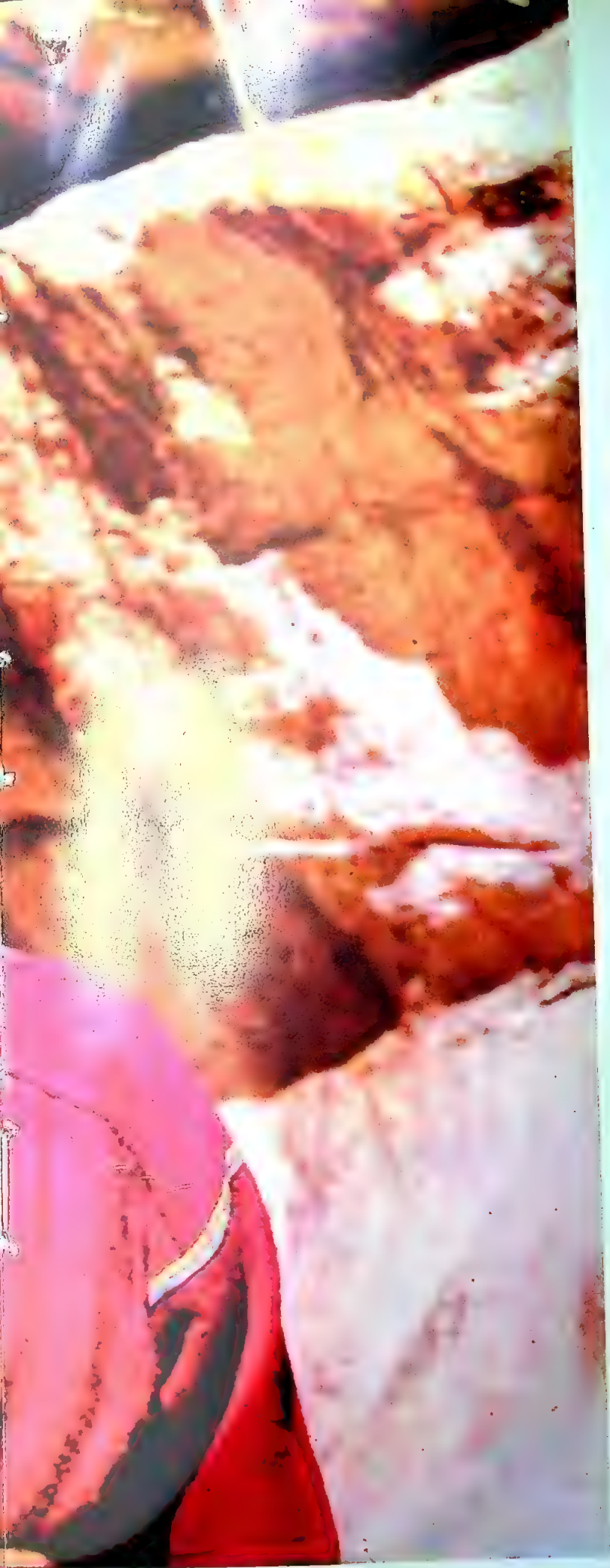


Srid-pe-Khorlo, the wheel of life.



First reproduction of a 12th century Tanka.





Drogpas, the ancient Aryan tribe.





Changpas, high altitude nomads.



Sakyamuni Buddha.

to their houses to conduct the prayers and reward them with cash and gifts for the religious services rendered.

Sonam then explained that polyandry is an old custom amongst Buddhists, which was now rapidly declining. It persisted in some remote villages and in some joint families. "But are not there more girls than boys in Ladakh?" I asked. "Then why polyandry?" "It is true..." he said, but found it difficult to explain the origin of this custom. With one-third of the Ladakhi males and a part of the female population leading celibate lives in far-flung monasteries, it can be asserted that dearth of women certainly was not the reason for polyandry. The main reason is to prevent the small land holdings from becoming too small and fragmented with innumerable divisions, depending on births in the family. Ladakhi girls, who outnumber boys, either seek a job after education or try to get married. "But we certainly find the marriage market extremely competitive," they say.

According to the polyandry custom, three brothers could share one wife. The eldest brother could pass on his rights to his younger brother after a week or so. And he to the next one after another week or so. Thus the three brothers shared the affections of a single wife. As per custom, in case there are more than three brothers, the fourth is asked to join a *gompa* and become a monk. The common wife has the right to co-opt a male outside the family if she so desires. This male then becomes a member of the family and not only enjoys conjugal rights but also the right to the material possessions of the family. But should he fail to please the wife at the end of a week, she has the right to turn him out of the house. He could expect to receive a sheep by way of compensation for flopping in this matrimonial adventure. Should he please her during the probationary week, he becomes a permanent husband. The wife reserves the right to take on as many brothers to her first husband as she likes.

Yet another interesting feature in Ladakh is that unlike most parts of India where the bride's father has to shell out dowry, here the bridegroom's side has to offer the dowry. The marriage proposal also comes from the boy's side. The dowry is usually to be given by the boy's maternal uncle. Normally it covers the cost of bringing up the girl.

The less affluent class of people in Ladakh do away with dowry by resorting to a quite informal marriage by virtually abducting the girl. The abduction is not crude or violent. So gentle is it that the girl's relatives have prior information about it. On the appointed day, the girl usually goes to her father's sister or some other relative. The boy's parents place a scarf over her head, signifying that the girl belongs to them. As dusk falls, the girl is taken to their home, where the marriage ceremony is performed. At the time of her marriage, the bride does not wear anything that belongs to her parents. All the clothes she wears are presented by her prospective in-laws. Before she enters the boy's house, a lama performs religious rites at the doorstep. After this ceremony, the bride and the bridegroom feed each other thrice with the same spoon. Then, they are pronounced man and wife. With the marriage thus solemnized, the husband, accompanied by some relatives and friends approaches the bride's parents for forgiveness the following day. This is usually granted by the parents who accept the gifts, and drink the *chang* brought by him.

Seven days later, the newly-wed couple is formally invited by the girl's parents and a grand reception is held in keeping with their resources. Thereafter, the girl is free to go to her parents' home any time. If her parents give her presents, these are listed and a record is maintained. The presents can include domestic animals besides jewellery and ornaments. As a tradition the cobra-type headgear, *perak* is handed over from mother to daughter as a wedding gift.

In the other kind of marriage custom, followed by the poorer people, the boy's maternal



Education is gradually spreading in Ladakh

uncle presents the traditional *khaiak* (scarf) and some money, the amount depending on his means. The wedding invitation is oral. A good host sends maid-servants to invite the women invitees to the wedding feast. The first verbal invitation comes in the morning. The second arrives a little later. Both are meant to be ignored. The third invitation, the one to be responded to, comes around mid-day. This is the time when all respectable guests head for the venue of the party. If the boy is marrying a girl who has only sisters and no brothers, he has to live with his in-laws. In such cases, the dowry comes from the girl's father. The common feature among Ladakhi wedding is the massive consumption of *chang*, the local barley beer. The success of a party is decided by the quality of *chang* and how drunk the guests were, not by how many or who attended or what delicacies were served. Drinking is popular among both men and women.

If entering into matrimony is a simple affair, getting out of it by divorce is equally easy. All that needs to be done is for the elders to sit together with the couple and decide the case on terms favourable to both the parties. It is only recently that some cases have started going to courts. After the divorce, the dowry and presents given by the bride's parents are returned to them.

Ladakhi girls marry late now. Earlier, they used to be married at the age of twelve or so. But now they may be twenty years or even more before they marry. One of the reasons for this significant change is the gradual spread of education in Ladakh. There are a number of schools, including one Central school and numerous primary schools, each with about 200 students on its rolls. Students proceed to Jammu, Srinagar or Delhi after completing their school for further studies.

Dolma, a pretty Ladakhi girl, is among the sixty odd graduates in the district looking for a job. Nimma among the fifteen girls with a degree in education, is a teacher in a school at Leh and is looking forward to marrying and settling down. The cases of Dolma and Nimma, in search of jobs and husbands, can be said to be demonstrative of the social problem which is gradually assuming political and even communal overtones. According to Buddhist leaders, some girls of their community have married non-Buddhists in the last decade. "Every Buddhist girl who marries outside the faith must be regarded as a loss to the Buddhist community and it is not the loss of one individual but of entire family," says Lama Lobzang. The Buddhist community fears that its population is declining and there is a proportionate increase in that of non-Buddhists. As per 1971 census, the Buddhist population was, 26,741 males and 27,824 females. The Muslim population was, 25,240 males and 23,891 females. It is feared that since 1971, the Buddhist population has further reduced. This change, they say, will change the basic character of Ladakh by reducing the Buddhists to a minority in the coming years. Buddhism, they say, has survived many an onslaught in the past from the external enemies, but now it has to face the threat from within.

Ladakhi women can be as feminine as any other woman in the world. They do not bind their feet, like the Chinese or the Japanese, to keep them tiny. Nor do they observe *purdah* like Muslim women. Their place, in the Ladakhi society is in the home, to look after the house, the children, and the family. Their contribution in the economy of the region is no less significant, as they work on the land like their male counterparts. The taboo is that women may participate in all agricultural activities except ploughing the land. It is encouraging, however, against this backdrop to see Ladakhi women take up jobs previously held by men. On festive days, it is a pleasure to see a Ladakhi girl, bedecked with jewellery, and the exquisite turquoise headgear and a sweet smile on her face.

Ladakhis, like people in other parts of the Himalayas, are very hospitable, polite and

easy-going. They race neither for time nor money. They never ask more of life than they deserve. They all have superb manners. Whenever anybody passes through their villages or meets the inhabitants, he is always greeted with a smile.

Even a casual visitor cannot fail to be impressed by their sincerity and honesty. Once in the course of a climb in north-western Sikkim in 1962, we were passing through an orange-growing area. It was the beginning of spring and I remember vividly the hillside was covered with foliage. We entered an orange orchard and started plucking the fruit. The sherpa who was with us told that the orchard belonged to a lama and that we must pay for what we had eaten. The sherpa went inside and returned with the lama's son whom we paid a rupee and said that we had eaten about twenty oranges. The boy asked us to wait and quickly came back with a basket full of thirty oranges and said that they were fifty for a rupee. We were greatly impressed. Such honesty, we mused, is indeed rare.

Ladakhis, like Tibetans, believe in astrology for the purposes of horoscope. The head of the house knows by heart his own as well as his family's astrology chart. It is his duty to give sufficient warning of the bad or the evil that is to come. This astrology is almost a part of their life and the individual horoscopes are taken in full account while making new decisions or in case of ill luck or sickness. As regards the days of the week, by and large, Saturdays, Sundays and Tuesdays are always considered bad for travelling. In case of travelling towards south, Monday is considered auspicious but for other directions it is not favourable. Thursday is favourable for travelling towards west. As regards business transactions, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays are considered good. Saturdays must be avoided. Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays are considered favourable for marriages.

Peculiar Ladakhi Customs

The death rites in Ladakh are similar to those followed in Tibet. A child below the age of eight is buried, but older children and adults are cremated. When a person dies, the body is kept in the house for a week for performance of rites and prayers. Lamas remain in the house during this period. They sleep and eat in the same room where the dead body is kept while men and women sitting in a separate room mourn for the deceased. The body is not kept in a lying position but is tied up in a sitting position. In summer the body is kept cool by hay and sprinkling water over it. A sort of crown is put over the head of the corpse. The body is brought down the stairs usually by the eldest son of the family on his back and then put in a coffin-box and carried for cremation.

The body is put in an oven built above the ground and the wood is burnt from below so that comparatively less wood is consumed. This method of cremation is perhaps followed because of the shortage of wood. The practice of tying the body in a sitting position has an interesting origin. It is stated that once while prayers were in progress on the seventh day after death, the corpse rose from the bed and tried to rush out of the house through the door where it was hit on the forehead by the lintel of the door and fell. This created a difficult problem for completion of the death rites. To prevent any possible recurrence of such an incident, the body is securely tied with ropes in a sitting posture.

Many inhabitants of Ladakh do not take a bath as a habit. In the Changthang Rupshu area people do not bathe primarily due to cold. Elsewhere bathing is avoided because of some taboo or because of a belief that it would bring bad luck. Both men and women wear a head-dress. To move about without headgear is not considered respectable. Ladakhis use various utensils. The poor people have simple goblets of wood. Those more prosperous have goblets of wood mounted in silver. The very rich ones use silver goblets. Normally they stick to



Row of chortens as seen from Shey monastery

their own personal utensils, such as cups and spoons, and do not borrow those of their neighbours. A large spoon is an important and universal article. It is made of metal with an exotic design and is usually hung from the girdle. The upper part of the spoon is used for stirring *sattu*, roasted barley or any other kind of food, and the lower one for sipping broth.

Festivals

The most popular festival, "Losar" is celebrated in the eleventh month of the Buddhist calendar. It is said that the Ladakhi king, Jamyang Namgyal in the fifteenth century gave a country-wide call for a battle with the king of Skardu. It was unanimously decided that Losar should be celebrated in advance since many might not survive the battle. The battle was won

but the celebration was traditionalized and continues to be celebrated in the odd 11th month.

In this festival, like Diwali in the rest of India, there are illuminations. Prayers are held in the monastery in the evening. A great fire is lit to shut out the evils of the ending year and at night there is a traditional Ladakhi dinner called *gothuk*. The festival lasts three days with torch-light processions, horse-shows and banquets where *chang* flows in abundance.

Last year I attended this festival in the Ladakhi monastery, Buddha Vihara in Delhi with Lama Lobzang. The religious New Year festival Dosmoche is celebrated near the winter solstice. Among the other festivals celebrated in Ladakh are each monastery's annual day: *Mothos* in January, *Chimre* in September, *Spituk* in November, *Thiksay* and *Sakti* in December. The most important festival and the only one held in summer is that of "Hemis" in June.

Hemis



The Buddha

ORDERING OF THE GOMPA

Name of the Gumpa	No. of lamas attached to the Gumpa	No. of villages attached to the Gumpa through ownership of land	No. of villages attached to the Gumpa through religious affiliation	Area of land owned (acres) (4)	No. of persons recognising the Gumpa (1)	No. of medium or sub Gompas (2)	Area served or area of the domain (Sq. miles) (3)	Composite score	Rank of Gumpa
Hemis	500(1)	51(1)	55(1)	1998.3(1)	15661(1)	6(1)	5272(1)	7	1
Thiksay	300(2)	25(2)	19(2)	1307.8(2)	5969(3)	2(4)	1573(3)	18	2
Likir	500(4)	18(5)	18(3)	263.3(8)	4865(6)	2(4)	1420(5)	32	3
Phyang	115(6)	14(7)	10(7)	360.0(7)	5909(4)	3(3)	1965(2)	36	4
Chimre	300(2)	22(3)	8(8)	375.8(6)	3420(8)	1(5)	1105(6)	38	5
Spituk	200(4)	13(8)	11(6)	582.8(3)	5853(5)	3(3)	729(9)	38	5
Lamayuru	210(3)	16(6)	14(4)	234.5(11)	5574(2)	4(2)	511(10)	38	5
Rezong	100(7)	19(4)	8(8)	496.4(5)	1408(9)	1(5)	1452(4)	42	6
Stakna	300(2)	12(9)	6(9)	516.7(4)	1071(11)	1(5)	955(7)	47	7
Karsha*	150(5)	13(8)	13(5)	239.9(10)	3569(7)	—(6)	766(8)	49	8
Mathos	80(8)	5(10)	3(10)	242.1(9)	955(12)	—(6)	—(12)	67	9
Takthak	100(7)	2(12)	2(11)	40.3(13)	1098(10)	—(6)	—(12)	71	10
Takrimo*	50(9)	3(11)	3(10)	64.3(12)	731(13)	—(6)	98(11)	72	11

*The Karsha and the Takrimo Gompas are governed by Likir and Stakna Gompas respectively in terms of spiritual matters. Since these are located at a considerable distance from the other monasteries in an isolated territory of Zaskar Tehsil and also function semi-independently regarding their economic and political matters, they have therefore, been taken as independent Gompas.

1, 2, 3. These figures are approximate.

4. The information regarding the land owned by the Gompas in each village has been compiled from the village record books. Excepting a few, others do not tally with the figures gathered from the personal records of Lama Sonam Giran, President of all Ladakh Gumpa Association.

Note: The figures inside the parenthesis indicate the relative rank of each Gumpa according to the respective variables.



Prayer carvings.



Animism.





A woman from Yarkhand with her Ladakhi friend



A Ladakhi beauty.

If you drive some forty kilometres from Leh, along the Indus towards the Sino-Indian border, cross the river on your right, and go up another four kilometres, you will be at the famous monastery of Hemis. Should you happen to be there in winter, the last four kilometres will be covered with snow and your jeep tyres will have to be encircled with anti-skid chains.

Hemis is considered to be the "*Gompa* of the *Gompas*." Its hold over the religious life of Ladakh, is the strongest of all *gompas*. Every Ladakhi Buddhist is expected to visit Hemis *gompa* at least once in his lifetime. Hemis occupies a position at the apex of the *gompa* hierarchy mainly because (a) it owns the largest landed estate (810 hectares) in Ladakh and its domain or area of influence encircles 13,520 square kilometres covering fifty-one villages; (b) because of its association with the royal family, the *kushok* (head lama) was the *guru* (master) of Singe Namgyal one of the most important rulers of Ladakh; and (c) because it is the most famous and the wealthiest convent of the Ka-gyu-pa sect of Buddhism. What strengthens the other worldly nexus of the Hemis *gompa* is its location which creates a perception of complete isolation from the surrounding territory. It can hardly be seen from a distance, and is not easily accessible. It is the Buddhist belief, that the difficult and tortuous approach symbolizes the path to the attainment of religious virtue.

Among Ladakhis, there is a general spiritual belief in the association between elevation and location of the place of worship. To them, the higher the *gompas* the closer they feel to their deity. Even judging by the criteria of the hierarchical order of the *gompas*, Hemis ranks first by virtue of having the largest number of lamas attached to it, the largest number of villages attached to it through ownership of land and religious affiliation, and six medium or sub-*gompas* attached to it. Hemis, in terms of religious importance, is to Ladakhi Buddhists what the Potala Palace in Lhasa is to Tibetan Buddhists. Next to Hemis in successive importance are, Thiksay, Likir, Phyang, Chimre, Spituk, Lamayuru, Rezong, Stakna, Karsha, Mathos, Takthak and Takrimo *gompas*.

Gompas

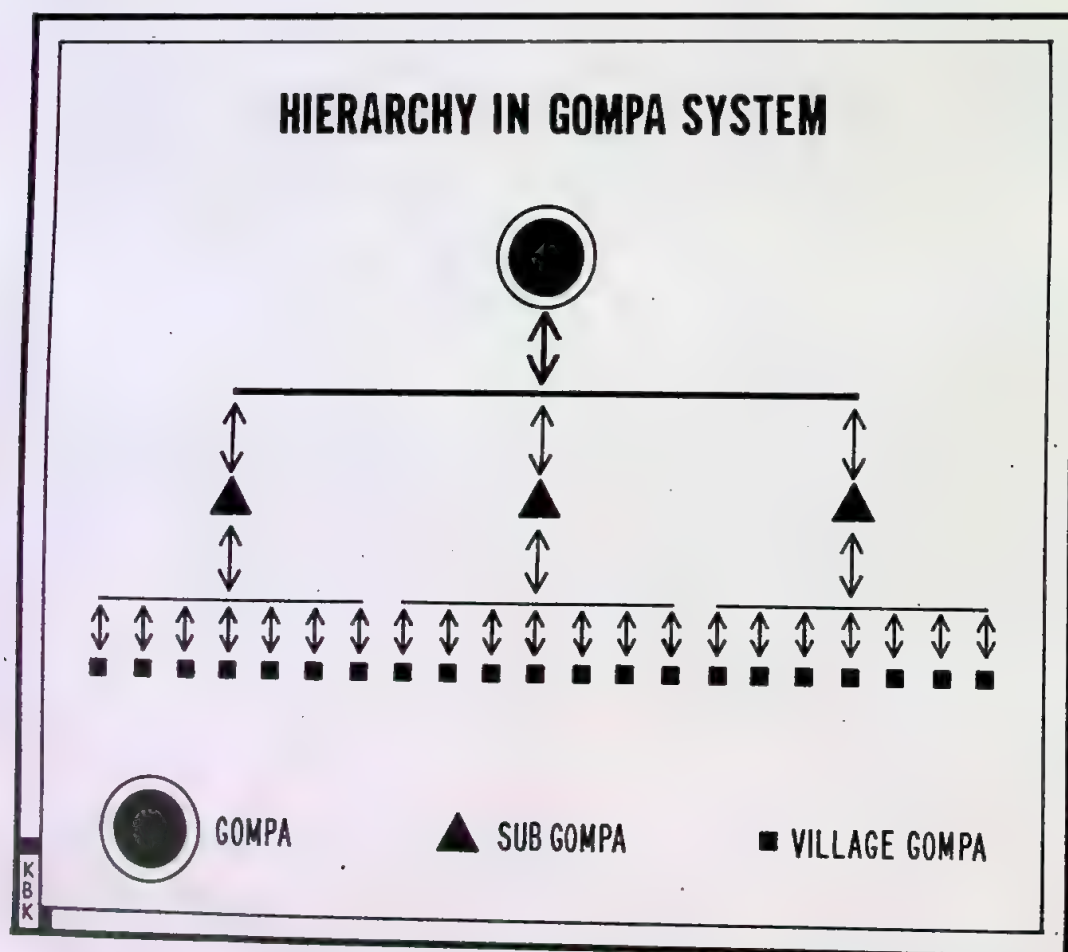
The word *gompa* refers to a solitary place. *Gompas* are always built away from the crowded and noisy influence of village settlements. The fact that most *gompas* are located along the major trade routes and their concentration near Leh, indicate their role in trade activity. Thus, the location of *gompas* on the trade routes extending from Kashmir valley to western Tibet, that is, Lamayuru, Spituk, Phyang, Thiksay, Hemis and Chimre, and from the plains of Punjab to Central Asia, such as Karsha, Takrimo, Zanskar and Deskit, becomes meaningfully significant. They are mostly located along the Indus and its tributaries. These are usually situated on steep slopes of hills, the tops of isolated craggy hills, the ends of the ridges and in the niche of cliffs—everywhere at an elevation higher than the adjacent settlements. Even the village-level *gompas* have been built on the outskirts of villages, at a higher altitude than that of the settlement, underlining the philosophic detachment from earthly affairs and positively correlating in the minds of the pilgrims, the level of spiritual status of the *gompa* with the variable of inaccessibility. The *gompas* also highlight the tradition of collective labour and the availability of considerable architectural skill without which it would not have been possible to put up such splendid and colourful buildings on difficult sites. The villages are immediately affiliated to their respective village *gompas* which in turn are affiliated to the medium *gompas* and ultimately to the major *gompas*.

The secret of the success of the *gompa* system probably lies in the ecological set up of Ladakh, which forced the economy to operate on a collective basis. The construction of agricultural fields and irrigation canals in this tough terrain called for collective effort. Such

village community centres must have come up to organize and regulate the collective effort. It is likely that when Buddhism reached Ladakh, these community centres of pre-Buddhist people, were converted into *gompas*, which continued to help the collective economy and acquired a significant place in the religious, social and cultural areas of life also. The Ladakhi kings encouraged these religious centres to flourish. Other important functions of the *gompas* were to provide a place of congregation and worship, accommodate and train monks, maintain Buddhist icons, preserve the remains and sometimes the bodies of the sacred lamas, and finally to preserve the holy scriptures, handwritten manuscripts, printed materials and other objects connected with spiritual exercises and activities.

Though the *gompas* are intricately woven into the socio-economic fabric of Ladakhi society, they are now essentially religious establishments catering to the spiritual needs of the people. The *gompa* lamas and *chomos* (nuns) not only train younger monks but also function as astrologers, prescribe and supply indigenous medicines. They participate and direct dance and drama organized at festivals, and also conduct the birth, marriage and death rites for the people.

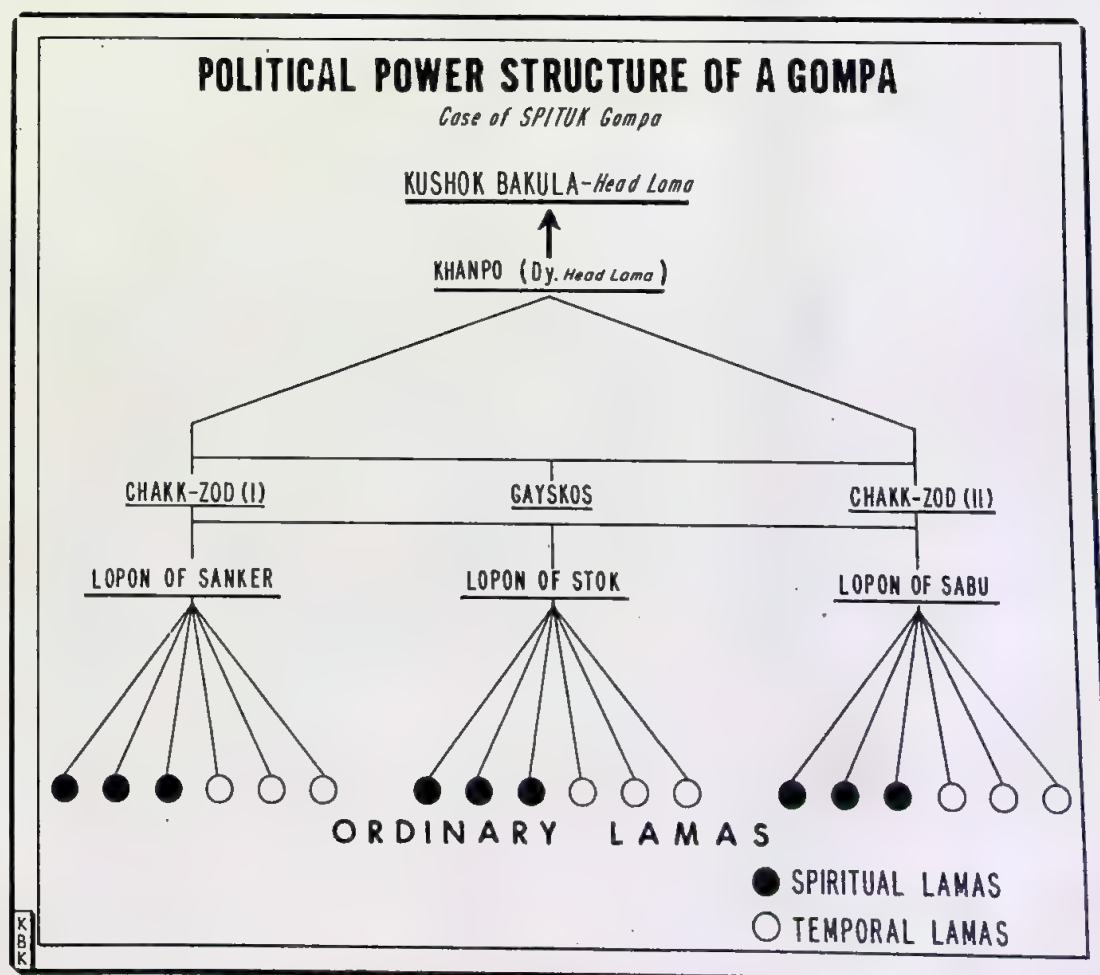
Since the monks are not supposed to work on the *gompa* lands, as there is a strong belief that their ploughing of the land will result in the death of numerous life-bearing objects, the villagers work either as tenants or agricultural labourers. The tenants pay one-fifth to half of the produce to the *gompa* as rent and they hold nothing in their own right. The farmers also manufacture woollen stuffs, jewellery and pottery for their ecclesiastical masters. The *gompas* derive their income from (a) rent from tenants; (b) agricultural produce cultivated by labourers in *gompa* lands; (c) donations from people; (d) trade; and (e) interest from money-lending operations. There are about 3,000 monks in Ladakh, of which 2,800 are in Leh



tehsil alone and the rest in Zaskar. This gives a fairly high ratio of priests to people, that is 1:18. Generally, every Buddhist sends one son to be ordained as a monk. It may either be the most loved or the most unwanted child in the family. In families where no sons are born, daughters are sent to become nuns.

All the thirteen major *gompas* of Ladakh own large landed estates, which make them fabulously rich. Indeed, the head lama of one big monastery enquired about the possibility of purchasing a helicopter so that he could communicate to Leh when required. This indicates the wealth that these far-flung *gompas* have already accumulated. This wealth has accrued from five sources. Some land has been assigned to them as *muafis* or grants by Ladakhi rulers in the past. Since the *kushok* of Hemis *gompa* has been the *raj kushok*, the king granted a large landed estate to the Hemis *gompa*. The *gompas* took over what initially was communal land. The affluent Buddhist families of Ladakh donated land as an act of piety. Some land was donated by proprietors who died heirless. And, finally, *gompas* acquired lands mortgaged to them by owners who failed to repay loans taken from *gompas*. Thus, *gompas* are comparable to a service-centre, performing religious, social, political, cultural and economic services, Ladakh thereby exemplifies a rather rare cultural area.

What strikes you first and foremost as you drive to Hemis, is the suspense that builds up during the approach. Since it is not at all visible from a distance, you feel you are heading for a range of snow-clad mountains. Indeed, so well concealed is it in the folds of this range, that it is only when you are almost at its doorstep that you realize how intelligently and strategically this *gompa* is located. The jeeps have to be left where the path narrows. The steep uphill walk begins. You go past tall willow and poplar trees and long mani-walls where every devout

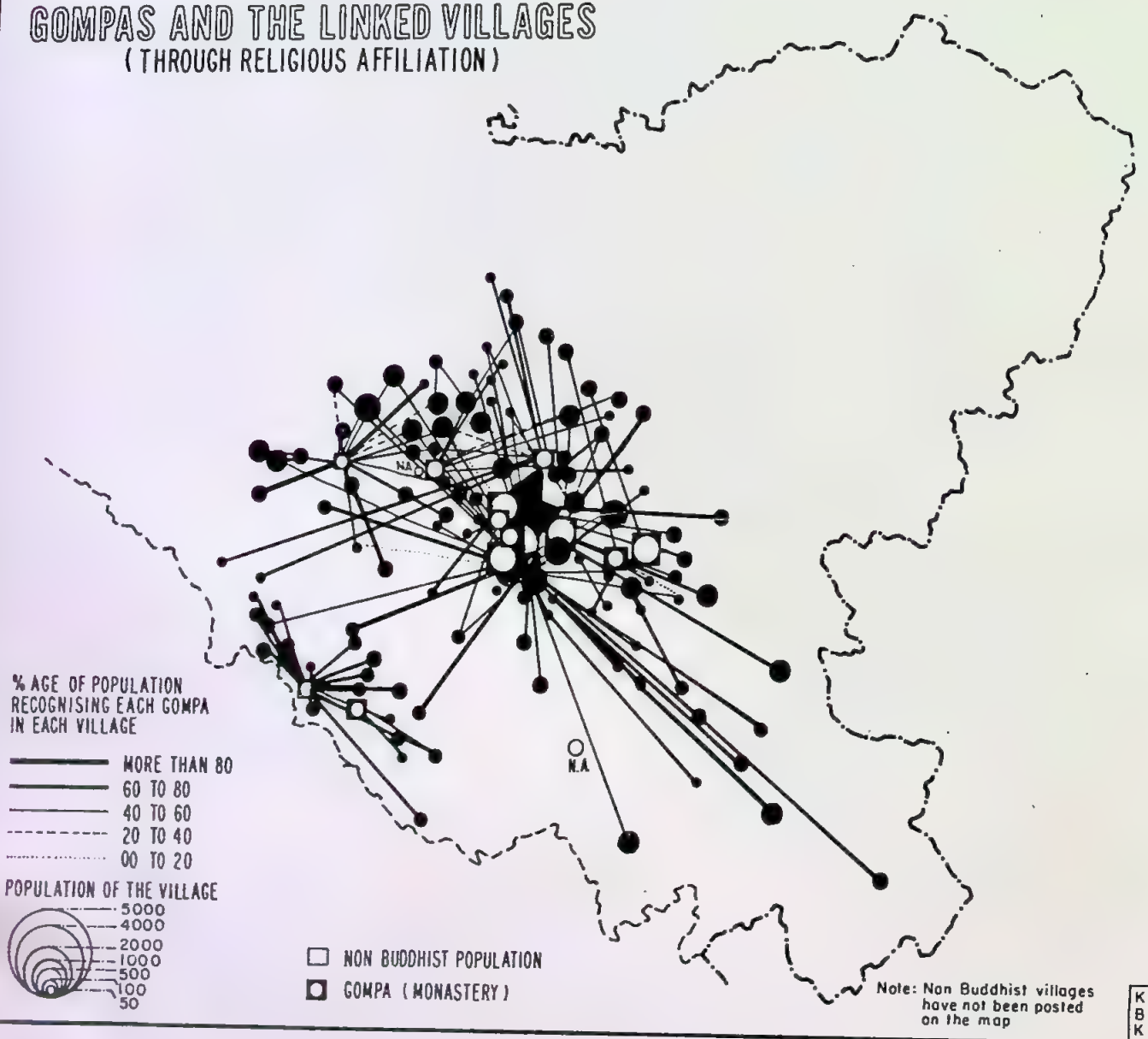


Buddhist visitor and pilgrim leaves a stone slab inscribed with a small prayer as an act of merit. The difficult approach to this hidden monastery explains why Hemis flourished, when almost all other *gompas* were plundered and damaged during the Dogra wars of 1834-41.

Standing in its large and ancient doorway, one sees a vast courtyard flanked by two big temples on the right and a row of monks' rooms on the left. In the centre of the courtyard, where the monastic dances take place, during the Hemis festival in summer, are three tall poles from which flutter the traditional prayer-flags together with locks of yak-hair. The innumerable prayer-wheels that line the courtyard are of tremendous interest. You find them in every imaginable size—from a tiny one that can be spun with one's little finger to a giant wheel that can be turned with either water-power or a dozen strong men.

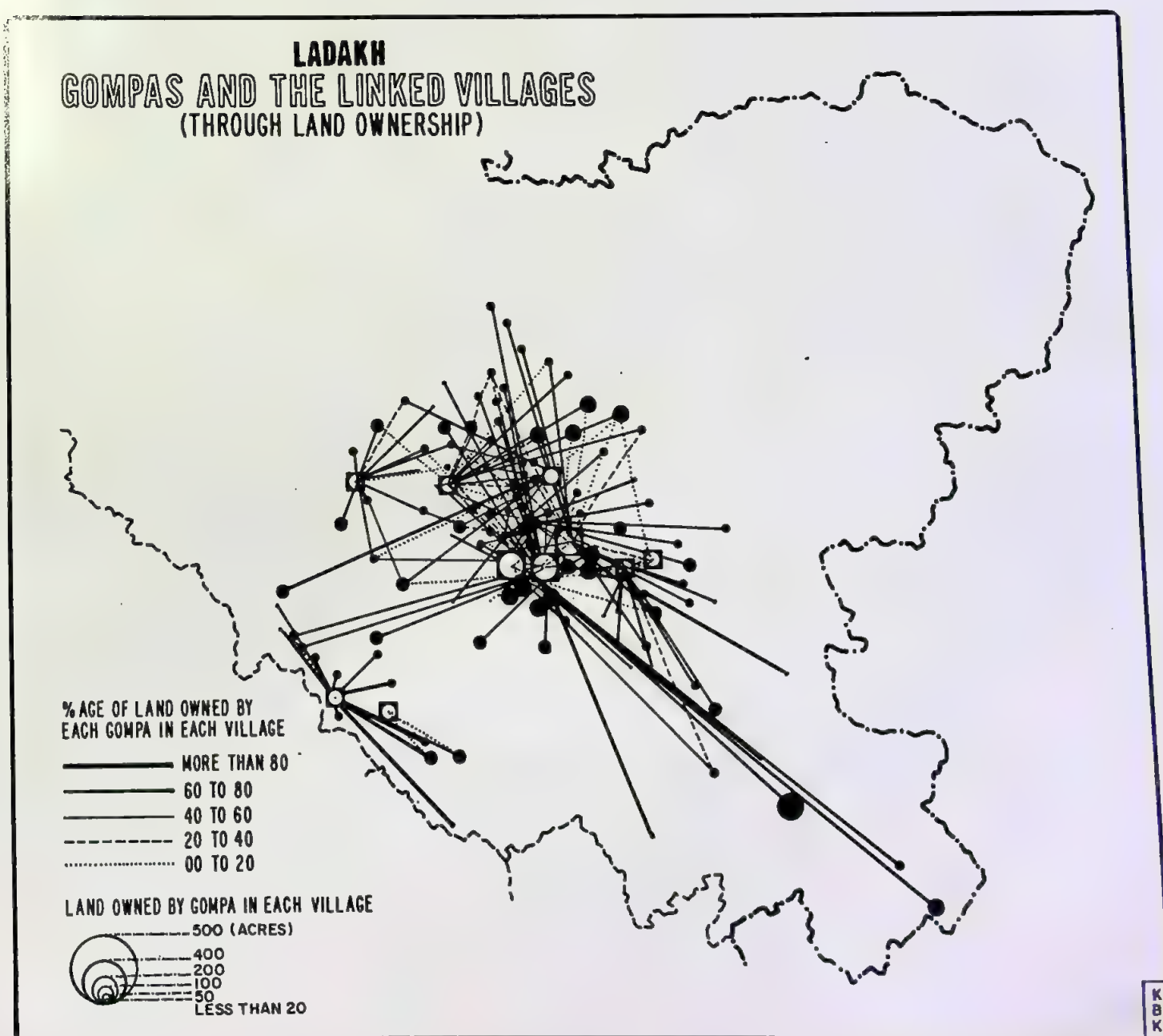
I found a young monk praying alone in the tranquil atmosphere of the temple. He was not only chanting Buddhist *mantras*, but was also playing three musical instruments, including drums. He could do this simultaneously, because intrinsic Buddhist *mantras* are to be chanted very slowly, almost monotonously, and no haste is made about it.

LADAKH GOMPAS AND THE LINKED VILLAGES (THROUGH RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION)



Lama Dance

The only time this *gompa* becomes alive, is when hundreds of monks and tourists gather for the annual Hemis festival in summer. Then to the accompaniment of drums, cymbals, and weird-looking pipes the lamas dance in slow, circular, languorous movements in the courtyard, their out-sized masks with grotesque expressions enhancing the exotic aura about this mysterious land. The dances performed by lamas in Hemis, during the festival have a religious and mystical significance. Their main objective is to demonstrate the triumph of Buddhism over the earlier animistic "Bon" religion, which believed that man was controlled by spirits and supernatural forces. The dancers, wearing masks portraying different divinities, depict through gestures, the battle between the good and evil forces. What attracts large number of people to the festival are the magnificently colourful costumes and masks and their spectacular appeal. The spectators know the stock-characters and what they symbolize and





have no difficulty in comprehending either the humour, satire or the serious and profound messages communicated through the dances. Some of the musical instruments (like the bugles) used on this occasion, are made of brass or copper or even human bones. Every one present including the monk dancers, drink plenty of *chang*.

The dancers wear costumes made of brocade silk in bright colours like red, blue, yellow, pink and green. Their headgear is elaborate. Some of them wield swords and knives during the dance, depending on the character they are portraying. Spectators too are attired in their best clothes, women wearing exquisitely beautiful turquoise head-dresses and glittering ornaments. Men, women and children look clean on this festive occasion. The figures usually portrayed in the dances are *Yama*, the Lord of Death and his demons, the "second Buddha" or Padmasambhava, sages from Buddhist scholars of the distant past, and others like the God of War, the God of Wealth, the protector of horses and other animals, the great tempter and so on. All evil forces are considered exorcized at the end of the prayer and the dance ceremony presided over by senior lamas. The people go back with their hearts filled with joy and contentment.

One major reason for these awesome and frightening masks is that they serve as constant reminders to the Buddhists about the evil spirits that hover around human beings and the need to "do good" and "be good" to combat them effectively. This religious belief has given Ladakh a very low crime rate. Indeed, there are virtually no thefts, no murders, and until recently, there was no police either, as the need for protection was not felt.

Buddhism, indeed, moulds the day-to-day life of the Ladakhis who belong to this faith. It gives them the will to live and to face adversities. You will never find the poor cursing their lot. Believing as they do, in the theory of reincarnation, they console themselves by attributing their poverty in this life to sins committed in previous births. Thus, even if a Buddhist is wearing torn clothes, he does not look discomfited. He suffers his unenviable state with dignity, not degradation.

Similarly, the theory of *karma* and the laws of reward and punishment guide their thinking in other matters. For instance, a bumper crop is due to the grace of their deities. Crop failure is because the deities are displeased with them. Solitude, which one has to contend with in this barren, snow desert, may produce some unhealthy psychological effects on a visitor, but Buddhists here regard loneliness as being conducive to meditation and prayers. Basically, therefore, it is the attitude that counts to make life happy and worthwhile, notwithstanding all the hardships one has to suffer. Everything is oriented to achieve the objective of attaining enlightenment by improving one's life in each birth. For example, if one has graduated from being a bird in the last birth to a human in this life, he has improved his life-cycle and his objective is nearer. In the course of achieving that objective, obstacles like poverty, pain and other hardships are borne stoically.

According to Buddhism, self-purification is the supreme form of victory. The Buddha once said:

All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts, if a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, suffering follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the cart. If a man speaks or acts with the pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.

(*Dhammapada*, Verses 1.2)

← Higher the Gompa, the closer they feel to their deity, Deskit monastery

What surprised me, however, was that Buddhist monks and lamas have no qualms in eating meat. I expected them to be strict vegetarians. I sought an explanation for this because not only do lamas eat meat but they serve it to guests right inside the monasteries. Try something similar in a temple or a *gurudwara*, you could well start a riot. I recall how as a guest of the head lama of Thyangboche, one of the two oldest monasteries in this part of the world enroute to Mount Everest, I was served yak meat with Chinese-style food. It shocked me to see the venerable head lama too partaking of yak meat, with the members of our expedition.

"If the animal is not sacrificed primarily for the monks and lamas, it is quite proper for us to eat it." I was told by Lama Lobzang, a short and stocky young monk, who looks after the Ladakh Buddha Vihara in Delhi and can claim to be a film-star by virtue of having appeared in an award-winning film, *Siddhartha*.

In other words, the head lama and others in the Thyangboche lamasery could eat yak meat with us because the yak was primarily slaughtered in our name, not their's! The lamas laughed when I told them they had devised this deviation for their own convenience. "Oh, it's cold up in the Himalayan ranges and meat keeps us warm," they said. I felt amused over the thought that so long as others were around lamas, the latter need never worry about getting meat as there would always be somebody in whose name the animal could be butchered. But it is not that lamas love to eat meat. They live frugally and their training is tough and exacting. It involves physical hardship, loneliness, hunger and lots of other problems that need strength, courage and patience to overcome them. At Hemis, for instance, one of the younger monks was assigned the duty of climbing up to the top of the craggy mountain behind the monastery to take food to a lama who was in hermitage. He has to do this thrice a day (sunrise, noon and sunset), for three years, three months and three days.

Hermitage

A hermitage is a place, carved in a rock, where a lama sits and meditates. It is usually made atop the hill where the monastery is located. The approach is steep and difficult to negotiate. Monastic rules provide the time frame for lamas to spend in hermitage. In some cases, it may be for a decade or more, in others, for a lifetime. In seclusion, he studies philosophical books, meditates and recites *mantras*. His only communication with the rest of the world is through the younger monk who serves him. The meditating lamas correspond to the Indian *sadhus*, who renounce the world, take *sanyas* and spend years in meditation and yoga in the snow-bound Himalayas. Their objective is to purify their inner beings and achieve powers to heal and foretell future events, to benefit mankind, apart from developing the capacity to deliver religious and philosophical discourses.

It has been the custom among Buddhist families to give one of their sons to a monastery for the preservation of *dharma*. Usually, training for monkhood begins at the tender age of seven or eight. It may even be earlier, as it was for Lama Lobzang, who, as a new-born child became seriously ill, leading his worried parents to solemnly promise that if he survived, he would be offered to the monastery to work for *dharma*. The head lama took a lock of the sick child's hair, put it in a container with some rice and made an offering to the Buddha. Though Lobzang lived with his parents, he spent most of the time in the monastery.

"When I was ten, I became a trainee under the Venerable Geshe Tsondus, my father's elder brother, who had returned from Tibet after obtaining the Geshe degree following thirty years' study in Drepung monastery said to be the biggest in the world," Lama Lobzang told me. Lobzang's *guru* chose a rock-cave near Spituk village atop a high rocky mountain to go into hermitage for twenty years. "I was with him for fifteen years." Lobzang recalled. Just

below the hermitage was Lobzang's dwelling place, also in a rock-cave, he would cook and make tea for his *guru* and receive some lessons to memorize when he went up at meal times. "I could not keep up with his routine in the beginning but gradually learnt everything. Initially, the solitude bugged me. I played marbles to kill boredom. But as I concentrated on what my *guru* told me, I changed myself and began taking things seriously," he said. The *guru* used to get up at 3AM and meditate, making Lobzang wonder whether he ever slept at all. The *guru's* tea and meals had to be ready at specific times. Since Lobzang like other trainee monks, did not have a watch, he would go by the shadow of the sun which fell on the markings on the ground. The *guru* would ring a bell whenever he wanted Lobzang to come up.

On most occasions, Lobzang found his *guru* in the typical Buddha's lotus posture, lost in meditation. He would sit with Lobzang while taking tea and talk to him on religion and philosophy for about an hour. "On my return, I would memorize the work given by him, meditate and then get ready to cook the meal," Lobzang says. The meal consisted of Ladakhi *tsampa*. "My *guru* did not take either onions or meat. His evening meals comprised of only salt butter tea. At that time, I would spend some three hours reciting prayers and showing him my homework in the dim light of a small lamp. I could return to my abode around



Lama Lobzang

midnight," he says. A remarkable feature about this *guru* was that Lobzang never found him ill or in need of medicine even though he wore very light clothing. Perhaps, it was a case of the mind dominating the body.

There were occasions when the *guru* and his devoted disciple were short of food. Lobzang was permitted to beg for *tsampa* (*sattu*) and flour which were necessary for survival. But he was forbidden to beg for butter, tea and oil as these were considered luxuries in a hermitage. Of course, if these came by way of offerings, they could be accepted. The *guru* had given up all his worldly possessions and owned nothing except some books and prayer material. Lobzang left him in November 1949 as he had to go to Lhasa for higher studies. His father looked after the *guru* for the latter part of his hermitage. But hardly had Lobzang spent five months in Lhasa when trouble broke out and he had to return. Thereafter, he received a scholarship from the Maha Buddha Society to study in Sarnath where he spent eleven years learning Hindi, Pali and Sanskrit. Lobzang is the brother of Sonam Wangyal, who climbed Mount Everest with me.

Hemis continues to be the centre of religious education. "Entrance is subject to an aptitude test. While a child can enter the monastery from any strata of society, rich or poor, only those who are intelligent can acquire proficiency and attain a high rank," a lama teacher in Hemis explained. On admittance, the child is taught by the traditional centuries-old system, which has proved effective in maintaining a high intellectual standard. After the basic teaching, the rigorous courses begin, in which the child learns the prescribed scriptures by heart. The scriptures are discussed by him with the teacher and with his fellow students. As he grows older, he memorizes the more difficult and lengthier treatises and becomes adept at in-depth discussions too. The main objective of such an education is to stimulate the mind and widen the horizons on various subjects like dance, drama, poetry, literature, music and astrology. Subjects in higher education include the art of healing, metaphysics and the philosophy of religion, including *madhyamika*, *vinaya* and the *tantric* features of Mahayana Buddhism.

The monastery of Hemis is a rich repository of Ladakhi art, culture and religion. Thanks to its location—3,650 metres above sea-level on the left bank of the Indus, Hemis remained safe from the plundering hordes that thundered across Ladakh; looting, damaging and destroying its monasteries. Indeed, the cloistered existence of Hemis prompted many monks to deposit their monastic treasures here for safe keeping.

The result is, that a wealth of antique Ladakhi treasures, that would fetch fancy prices in the West today is still to be found in Hemis. The treasures include centuries-old costumes that would cost a fortune to make today, accompanying colourful masks, ancient books, *pothis* (religious books) containing page after page written in gold, rare Ladakhi paintings, oriental bronzes and other curios. These treasures have inevitably tempted antique smugglers to become active, especially after Ladakh was opened to foreign tourists, in July 1974.

Almost every foreign tourist is fascinated by the craftsmanship and antiquity of the pieces on display and some of them are overpowered by an urge to carry back some items as souvenirs. Foreign tourists would be advised to check such purchases. If an item bears the seal of the "Buddhist Gumpa Association," it is certainly not meant to be taken out of Ladakh. The Central Bureau of Investigation and Interpol have been given specimens of the seal to prevent Ladakhi antiques from being smuggled into the international antiques' market.

The district superintendent of police, Mr K. Chospail, told me that for the first time an inventory of art treasures and antiques in each monastery has been compiled. Persuasion was used to overcome the initial resistance from lamas, who felt that a stamp or a seal in the House

of God was nothing short of defilement. But they agreed to it once they understood that the seal carried the name of the Buddhist Gompa Association.

"We have stamped 5359 old paintings and taken photographs of 912 antique statues," said Chospail. *Gompa* managers have also been trained to take better care of these fabulous art treasures. Only time will tell how far these measures will help protect and preserve Ladakh's monastic wealth from the scheming and greedy antique thieves. Yet, another major step being taken jointly by the Government of India, the Buddhist Mahasabha and UNESCO is the setting up of study panels that will evaluate, data, microfilm and translate all manuscripts available in the monasteries, not only in Ladakh, but in the entire region of northern India. Lama Lobzang told me that each study team will comprise of two Tibetan-speaking Sanskrit scholars and technical assistants to microfilm the manuscripts. Many of the manuscripts are anywhere between 500 years to 1000 years old. A complete and systematic documentation of all these religious, spiritual and philosophical works will undoubtedly contribute to the preservation and enrichment of Ladakhi heritage.

There is a somewhat unhappy feature about Hemis! And that is the absence of a presiding reincarnation despite its being a treasure-trove. The six-year old Tibetan boy, chosen as a reincarnate for Hemis went to Lhasa as was the custom then. Later, when the Chinese authorities allowed some Tibetans and Ladakhis to return to Ladakh, the reincarnate was not among the hundreds of people who crossed the border. By all reckoning, he appears to have chosen to stay on there itself. According to reports, he married a Tibetan girl.

It was around 1622 AD that Stag-tsang-raspa agreed to become *dBu-bLa* (chief lama) of Singe Namgyal who ruled Ladakh. This Buddhist monk wielded great influence over the Gyalpo, Gyalmo and all the lamas and the laity. He used his influence for unquestionably good purposes and helped build the big Maitreya at Basgo and other places, laid the foundation of the main temple at Chimre monastery (a sister monastery of Hemis), built the temple at Shey and also the assembly halls at Hemis. The chief lama's activity and influence continued unabated for twenty-nine years till his death in 1651 AD. His contribution went to project Singe Namgyal's reputation as a builder of *gompas* and saviour of the religion.

Hemis was controlled by Ladakh's most powerful monastic order, the Ka-gyu-pa, a branch of the Red sect, which had as its closest competitor, the Ge-lug-pa order, centred at Spituk. The Ka-gyus considered the Dharma Raja of Bhutan to be their head and controlled a majority of the Ladakhi monasteries. All abbots of Ka-gyu monasteries were appointed by an order given in his name. These monasteries sent annual gifts to Bhutan. The differences between the sects were more of form than of substance, for instance, members of the Red Sect were allowed to marry and engage in trade and farming. The kings of Ladakh were patrons of the Ka-gyu sect, but they did not hesitate to welcome a Ge-lug-pa mission to Ladakh, during the rule of King Trak-bum-de between 1410-40. The last king of the first Ladakhi dynasty reportedly sent rich presents to the first Dalai Lama and recognized the spiritual ascendancy of the fifth Dalai Lama (1617-82). Ladakh and Bhutan occasionally appealed to the Dalai Lama for settlement of royal succession disputes.

Interestingly, while Ladakh remained under secular rule, the kingdom's government and history were greatly influenced by Buddhism and its institutions. Indeed, Buddhism had an early beginning in Ladakh, its introduction probably preceding the faith's arrival in either China or Tibet. In 241 BC King Ashoka sent missionaries to the areas, which up to that time had practised a mixture of animism and totemism. Under inspiration from India, religion and culture flourished in Ladakh up to the eleventh century. Thereafter, with the decline of Buddhism in India, Ladakh looked to Lhasa for spiritual guidance, and it gradually became

“Tibetanized,” wherein the rise of the Yellow-robed sect (Ge-lug-pa) and the Dalai Lama in the fourteenth century marked the ascendancy of Lhasa.

The lamas got a prominent position in society. They took part in all ceremonies and acted as advisers and guides and thus played a very important part in day-to-day life of every Ladakhi. At times, the advice of an important lama was also sought by the government in State matters. The monastic establishments were given grants by the king. Monasteries, such as Hemis, had extensive properties. The monasteries never paid any tax on their earnings till the Dogra conquest. Thereafter levies were collected from the monasteries as well. According to Cunningham, Hemis had to pay Rs 900 as tax around 1850.

Monastic establishments, alas no longer enjoy the patronage of their traditional benefactors. In an entirely changed social and political environment, the present Queen or *Gyalmo* has to spend Rs 6,000 a year, simply to keep the butter-lamps burning in some chosen monasteries. This is an expensive religious duty.

Kalacakra

On our way to Hemis, we had noticed a large gathering of magenta and yellow-robed Buddhist monks gathered around a high rostrum. It was an idyllic spot, nestling right in the middle of three monasteries—Shey, Thiksay and Hemis, alongside the mighty Indus, with an azure sky as an umbrella. We were told that His Holiness, the Dalai Lama had performed the “Kalacakra” initiation ceremony a few days earlier here. Some 50,000 Tibetan-speaking Buddhists from all over India had assembled to witness the ceremony. Many had walked long distances to have a glimpse of their religious and spiritual leader. They formed serpentine queues, miles long, to pay their respects to their “Living God.” Bholi and I deeply regretted that we had so narrowly missed witnessing such an important Buddhist ceremony, highlighting an advanced meditational practice. But on our way back from Hemis, we decided to go up to the place where it was performed and find out all that had happened.

Helpful Buddhist monks explained to us the significance of this ceremony and its place in Buddhist religion and philosophy. It was for the first time that Kalacakra ceremony had been performed in Ladakh by no less a religious leader than the Dalai Lama himself. Curiously enough, none of his predecessors had performed this ceremony in Ladakh. No wonder the Ladakhis turned out in full strength to witness and participate in one of the greatest events in their lifetime. In addition, there were Buddhists from as far away as Karnataka in South India. Some foreigners and a group of hippies were also present. The significance of this ceremony is considerably enhanced when one learns that the Dalai Lama is allowed to perform the Kalacakra only thrice in his lifetime. He had undertaken a strenuous routine of fasting, meditation and prayers for several months to prepare himself for this exercise which is said to demand tremendous spiritual discipline.

Such was the enthusiasm of Ladakhi Buddhists that they spent Rs 130,000 on constructing a ten by ten metres stage, colourfully painted and richly decorated, on the banks of the Indus. It was shaped like a Tibetan *pagoda* and carried paintings of dragons. The Dalai Lama stayed in the Circuit House, a State government residential accommodation meant for touring ministers and officials. Full security arrangements were provided for him.

“It is a blessing merely to sit in the presence of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama,” said a monk. “It is like feeling the warmth of the sun’s rays,” said another, describing eloquently their feelings in the presence of the Great Master.

Apparently, the mass of people present could not be expected to understand the entire meaning of the Kalacakra ceremony. Briefly, for some it was nothing but a “short-cut to

salvation" and for others a means to secure "empowerment." So high-flown was the classical Tibetan spoken by the Dalai Lama on this memorable occasion that not even his interpreters could do justice to the task they were assigned. Consequently, the Dalai Lama gently rebuked them several times for improper and inaccurate translation. A witness to this memorable event said: "The interpreters were like colour-blind people who do not have the vision to see the colours."

Kala means time and *cakra* means wheel. Sakyamuni Gautam Buddha, the fourth of the 1,000 to appear during this world age, manifested himself in the form of Kalacakra meditational deity, a year after he attained Enlightenment. He was born in Lumbini in north India. His father, Suddhodhana, was the king of Kapilavastu. At the time, when he was born, social conditions in India were deplorable. The Indian society had become stagnant with superstitions, ritual, caste and untouchability. Gautam Buddha in his early life, awakened by the sufferings around, renounced his family and kingdom, and took to ascetic life.

His life was a combination of twelve main events. His descent from heaven, conception, birth, schooling, marriage, renunciation, penance, meditation, defeat of *mara* (the tempter), attainment of Buddhahood, preaching and departure to heaven. Gautam Buddha advocated the concept of *dharma*, called upon the people of the world irrespective of race, colour and religion to live together in peace and harmony and taught universal love and compassion for all living beings.

Buddha attained Enlightenment under a bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya, 2,500 years ago and thereafter travelled and preached about the Hinayana and Mahayana paths, the first leading to personal liberation and the second to full enlightenment in which the prime motive would be to seek liberation of all sentient beings. The common belief is that the Kalacakra has an unbroken lineage from the Buddha downwards to the fourteenth Dalai Lama, who received it intact from his senior tutor, Kyab-je Yong-dzin Ling Rinpoche, the ninety-seventh successor of RJe Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Ge-lug tradition of its Tibetan-Buddhism. One reason why the Dalai Lama gives the Kalacakra initiation is that in the future, twenty-five propagators will rule throughout the Universe and spread once more its teachings. At that time, all those who have received this initiation will be reborn, fully ripe to attain enlightenment through this meditational practice. "We are now in the region of the twenty-first propagator of Kalacakra, very soon the era of the twenty-second will begin," Buddhist scholars said.*

The monks told us that the rostrum occupied by the Dalai Lama served as the mandala abode of Kalacakra and the Dalai Lama was Kalacakra himself. The Kalacakra *Tantra* belongs to the mother class of Anuttarayoga *Tantra* which specializes in wisdom. The Tantrayana path of Mahayana leading to the goal of Buddhahood teaches varied and quick means for attaining this goal. Buddhahood can be interpreted here as liberation from suffering as well as omniscience, the full enlightenment of Buddhahood. To follow this speedier path, one must (a) renounce his own unhappiness and unsatisfactory way of life, (b) develop the pure *bodhicitta* motivation to become a Buddha himself in order to be able to liberate all others from their unhappiness, and (c) eliminate his own ignorance by realizing *sunyata* (voidness), the true way in which all things exist. Therefore, the motivation for receiving a *tantric* initiation like Kalacakra is extremely crucial.

In all Kalacakra initiations, the Kalacakra meditational deity has four faces, twenty-four arms and two legs. His front face is blue, with a slightly wrathful expression, fangs bared. His

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right face is red and left white. His face at the back is yellow. Each face has three eyes. The deity's lower set of eight arms is blue, the middle set red and the upper white. His body is blue, right leg is red and left white. He embraces a yellow consort with four faces and eight arms. "The initiation takes three days," a Buddhist monk told me. The first day is devoted to the preparation ceremony, when the initiator explains the three prerequisites for *tantric* practice—renunciation, an enlightened motive of *Bodhicitta* and a correct understanding of *sunyata*.

"Since we disciples are not allowed to enter the mandala abode on the first day, we imagine ourselves waiting at the tip of the giant *vajra*-diamond-sceptre at its eastern gate." Males visualize themselves in the form of a two-armed, single-faced blue Kalacakra embracing a two-armed, single-faced consort, and females vice versa. "With folded hands, we request initiation. We do not think of ourselves, our surroundings or our Master in ordinary terms," a lama told me. During the preparation ceremony, one person, representing all the disciples, tosses a stick on a special tray, if the stick falls from the tray thrice, the disciples may not receive initiation at that time. The actual initiation is held on the second and third days and consists of four sets of ceremonies. The first set begins once the Master Kalacakra and his visualized consort have given birth to the disciples in the mandala. As infant, the Master cares for you like a mother, preparing your consciousness for ripening.

The first seven-phased set of this exotic initiation begins with bathing the "newborn" (the initiate) with water, planting seeds in his mind-stream, and ending with whispering into his ear a secret name of one of the five *dhyani* Buddhas to enable him to attain enlightenment.

The second set of initiations has sexual undertones about it. It is more advanced and is divided into four parts. First is the "vase initiation." As the Master holds up a vase, you should visualize an offering goddess appearing with a vase filled with the nectar of white *bodhicitta*. As she pours nectar on your head, filling your body, you should feel fully authorized to perform the meditations of the development stage of the Kalacakra practice. Second is the "secret initiation." "The Master as Kalacakra sits in union with his visualized consort experiencing blissful voidness and producing secret substances. These are given to the disciples to taste in the form of clear tea and yoghurt, and when sipping, you should imagine you are receiving a taste of the experience of the blissful realization of voidness," the monk explained. Third is the "wisdom initiation" during which the disciple visualizes himself being given a consort by the Master. Sitting in union, the disciple imagines he too is experiencing voidness and bliss himself. Fourth is the "word initiation" which usually is a prophecy by the Master about where and when you will attain enlightenment.

"In the Kalacakra initiation" the monk explained, "you should imagine you are now experiencing voidness and bliss through the control of your own energies. Visualizing white *bodhicitta* falling from your head to the tip of your sexual organ and then rising back up without a drop being lost, you should imagine you are experiencing the various stages of voidness and bliss."

The third set of initiations, the most advanced, has the same four parts as the previous set but differs slightly in its visualizations. For the vase initiation, for instance, you should visualize nine offering goddesses rather than one. The effect of the vase initiation is the elimination of the obstacles of your physical body. With this, you receive the seeds and power to attain an incarnate physical body of a Buddha (*nirmana kaya*). The secret initiation eliminates the obstacles of your speech and plants the seeds and power for your attainment of, a utility body (*Sambhoga kaya*). The wisdom initiation enables you to attain a wisdom-truth body of Buddha (*jnanadharma kaya*) that is omniscience. And the word initiation enables



Thiksay Monastery

attainment of a wisdom-nature body of Buddha (*svabhava kaya*), that is, the voidness of a Buddha's mind and all its wisdom. The final initiation is that of the *Tantric* Master Overlord, with no specific visualization. It is like a formal inauguration ceremony to celebrate having received full authorization for Kalacakra practice. Also as a part of the initiation in general, you take *bodhicitta* and *tantric* vows. Thus, it is evident that seeking initiation of the Kalacakra *tantra* demands an enlightened motive, a spirit of renunciation and an awfully immense capacity to concentrate, imagine, visualize and absorb.

The Buddhist centres of learning like Nalanda, Vikramasila and Odantapuri were destroyed with the fall of the Pala dyanasty due to Muslim invasion. Despite the setback in India, Buddhism spread rapidly in East and South-east Asia, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), the northern frontier regions of India and in Tibet with the result that social, cultural and religious patterns from Central Tibet became far more pronounced. Ladakh thus began to derive its

spiritual and religious inspiration from Tibet. Buddhism reduced the militancy of the people and brought about a code of compassion. With Tibet having been lost to the Chinese, Ladakh remains the last stronghold of Tibetan culture and religion.

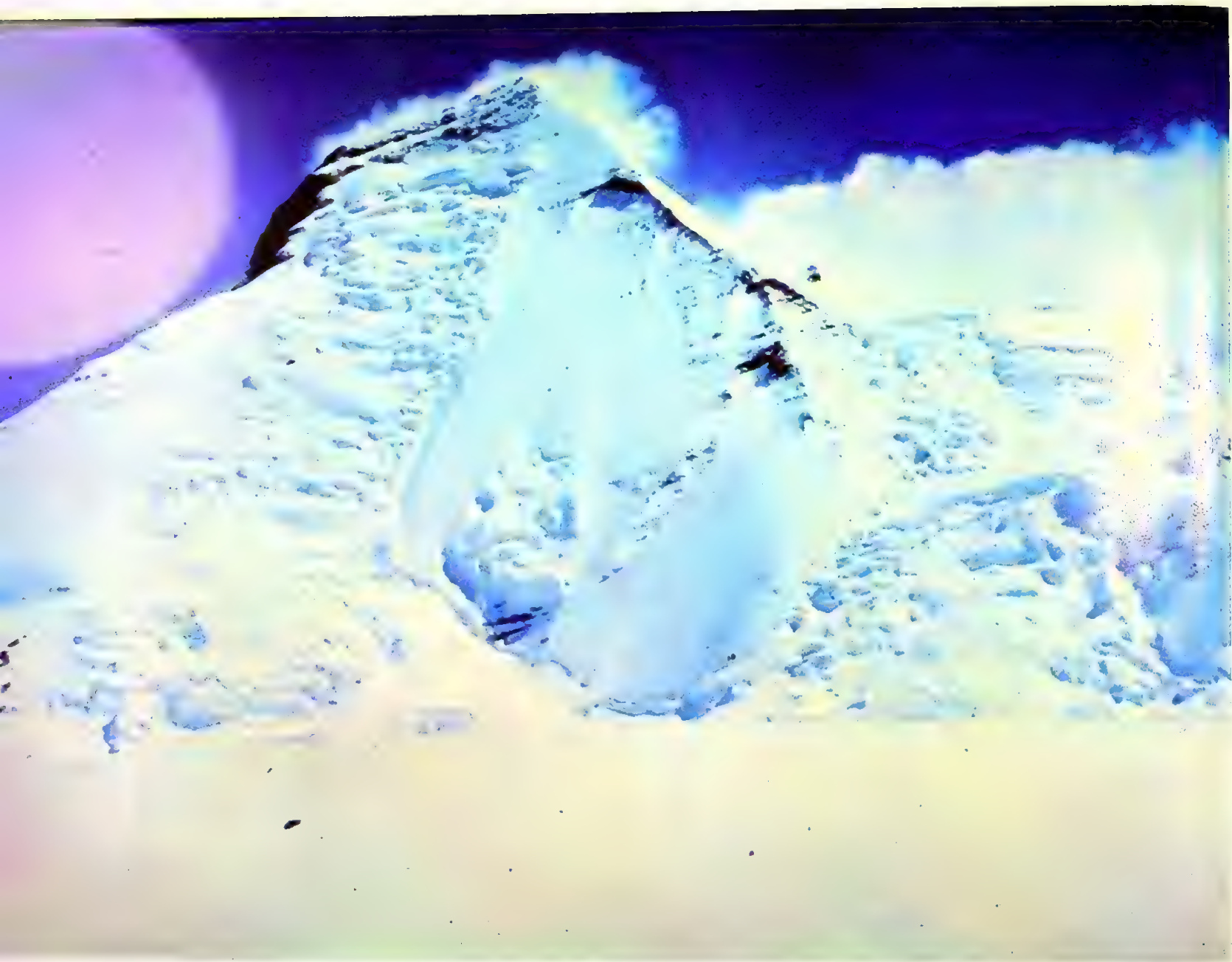
It is with this perspective that the Dalai Lama chose to perform the first ever Kalacakra ceremony in Ladakh. It is bound to prevent the faith from crumbling and collapsing. The mass initiation in which thousands of Buddhists participated will act as a catalyst to strengthen Buddhism and help it spread and flourish. The process of religious revivalism can be said to have begun in Ladakh. Just as Ladakh is the last bastion of Tibetology, it is also the last stronghold of one of the most ancient Aryan tribes, the Drogpas, which is on the verge of extinction.







Ganglas-the highest village in Leh valley.



Nun (ht. 7,135m).



The Suru valley and the climbers.







Field Research Laboratory, Leh.



A Dard village of ancient Aryan tribe, the Droghda

*Mind is the Forerunner of all phenomena. Mind is Supreme—
Everything is mind made.*

From the Dhammapada of Gautam Buddha

*What neither mother, nor father, nor any relative can do, a
well-directed mind does and thereby elevates one.*

From the Dhammapada of Gautam Buddha

Harvesting anywhere is a time to rejoice. Farmers sing and dance and hold feasts, especially if the crop has been a good one. In many regions of India, the harvest season has generated joyous songs and vigorous dances, all of which have been assimilated in India's folk culture which is unique for its depth and variety. Obviously, what is celebrated is the fertility of the soil and the magnanimity of the gods who have enabled a good crop. Thus, the harvest festival is a manner of thanksgiving. What makes it different in the ancient Aryan tribal villages in Ladakh is that the harvest festival is also celebrated as a festival of fertility.

Some settlements considered to be of the purest survivors of some Aryan race, live in the cluster of villages of Da, Hanu, Dhartsig and Gorkon, some 130 kilometres north-east of Kargil. These are also known as Dard villages. Da and Hanu are situated on the northern bank of the Indus, on the road to Baltistan. In the fifteenth century, Brogpa, the Dard district of Da, was annexed by Kashmir, till then a part of gNa-ris-skor-sum, the gold-bearing belt.

The week-long festival is an occasion to drink, eat the best food and make love with many women. Erotic songs are sung in gay abandon during this period of free sex for all the tribals in these villages, who gather in one village for the celebration. The belief is that if the land has been kind to them in yielding food, its women too will bear them children.

In-breeding in these tribals over generations has created health problems and like the almost barren soil in this region, many women too are barren. Therefore, this raw experiment in sex is an opportunity for these women to hope that they may copulate with one such male during the festival who will succeed in lodging his seed inside them. A pregnancy after the festival is an event looked forward to and welcomed. The happy mother-to-be need not necessarily know who the father is. That just does not matter. What matters is that she is going to bear a child. And, perhaps, even if she wanted to know who the father was, that would be a difficult task after having had sexual intercourse with several males. No questions are asked nor explanations sought. Since the tribals here do not feel the need to use contraceptives, the advice given to urban dwellers to use contraceptives does not hold good for them. The festival of fertility that accompanies Srub-Lha or the harvest festival every three years, is one of the brightest features of tribal life in this particular region of Ladakh and already appears to have attracted outsiders. An interesting aspect of free love in almost all hill tribes is that the freedom is confined to the community and they do not normally encourage outsiders.

Travelling in search of the "Aryan seed" was a group of German girls. They came all the way to Ladakh hoping to carry back with them the seed of what is believed to be one of the purest survivors of the Aryan race. These sophisticated young ladies from the Western world, incredibly enough, were not only willing but eager to have sexual intercourse with these tribal males. I suspect the tribal males would have also been glad to have sex with these white blondes, bored as they perhaps might be of circulating among their own women-folk. But what the German girls probably did not know was when to come. They were unaware of the festival of fertility until they visited Ladakh. Whether the tribal women would have allowed their men to sleep with these foreigners will remain a question mark. The answer may come when the German girls make their approach at the right time if they persist in their motive.

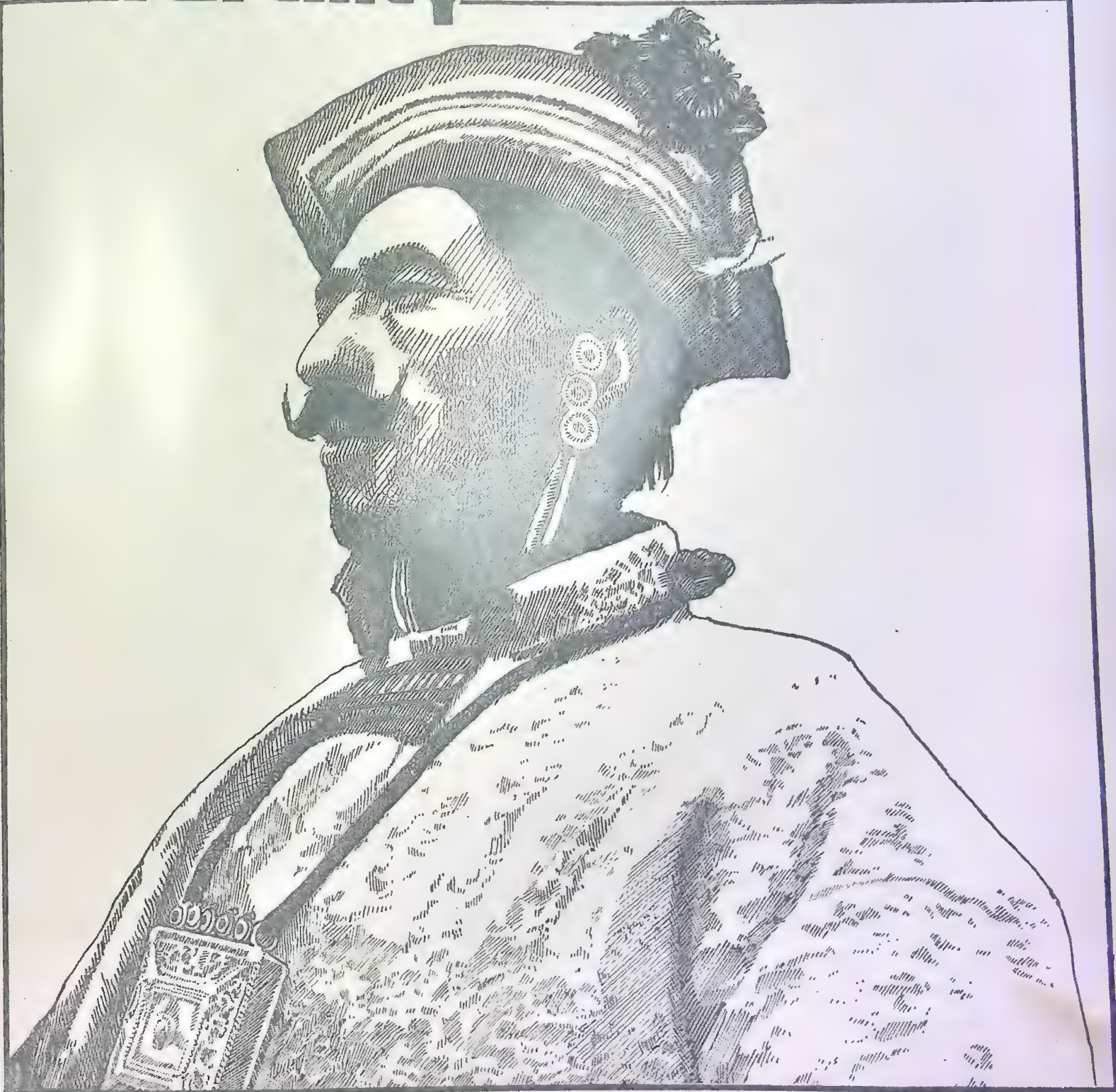
It is paradoxical that among these tribals who enjoy free sex at least during the festival of fertility, great stress is laid on "purity" of the race. For preserving this purity of race and culture, they are reluctant to take up jobs offered by various organizations and to marry outside their own little community. It is tragic that the price they are paying for maintaining this "purity" is the drift of their tribe towards extinction.

The large-scale inter-tribal promiscuity must inevitably be leading to sexually transmitted diseases. However, in view of the general infertility among the women here and the sexual

May all beings have clothes, food and drink, garlands, sandal wood fragrance, ornaments, all that their heart desires, and all that is most advantageous. Let the fearful become fearless, and those afflicted with sufferings attain joy; let those distressed be free from distress and attain peace.

(Bodhicaryavatara, X.20-21)

Festival of Fertility



a rough survey showed that there were only thirty-six houses in Gorkon village, thirty-six in Da and thirty-five in Dhartsig village. The main profession is agriculture. They grow barley and *bajra*. Apricots and grapes grow in abundance. They dry the apricots to preserve them for winters and make wine from grapes. It is mostly women who work in the fields. Men do the ploughing. There are no hospitals in these villages as people enjoy good health. The literacy percentage is very low. There are three primary schools in these villages and one high school for all the villages. One girl who has passed eighth standard works as a teacher in Hanu village.

Their dwellings are usually double-storeyed. The ground floor is reserved for tethering animals at night and the first floor is just one big room for all purposes—cooking, sleeping and sitting. The flat roof is used for storing grain and for drying apricots. The women are extremely hospitable and will cheerfully serve you wine, dry apricots and the fruit of the season.

The other important tribe is Changpas, the up-country pastoral community. The Changpas of Ladakh, have retained their ancient nomadic glory, inspite of the continuing hardships and harsh weather. They live in the higher regions of Changthang at heights above 4,500 metres. Their means of livelihood depend on their herds of yak, sheep, goats, and horses with whom they migrate from one pastoral land to another. Within Changthang, they can be spotted from a distance by their *rebos* (black yak hair tents) pitched with the help of small but firm wooden sticks which cannot be replaced easily as the region is barren and wood is scarce.

The name Changpa distinguishes a northerner from a southerner, a plateau-dweller from the dweller of a narrow valley (*rongpa*), and a purely nomadic grazer from a part-time house-dweller. On reaching the extreme north in Ladakh, we found the house-dwellers describe the *rebo*-dwellers as nomads, the elusive Changpas live in Tibet still farther to the north. In the context of Ladakh, however, it is appropriate to call the pure nomads of Changthang (most of whom originally belong to Tibet) Changpas, in spite of their reluctance to accept the nomenclature.

Changpas are warm-hearted people, devoted to their families and flocks. They are Buddhists, socially active and love music and dancing. Their social contacts are confined to *rebo*-dwellers. Their tents are adequately furnished with sheep-skin mats and their day-to-day provisions stored in goat-skin bags or goat-hair sacks. They prefer to sleep by the side of their flock right in the open even in winter when the temperature is almost 40°C below zero. They do this to guard their flocks from preying animals. During summer the Changpas move in the mountain areas and in winter they come to the sunny open fields along the Indus basin and camp by the side of the river. In winter their cattle survive on tough grass and if the winter is severe, many animals die for want of fodder.

The Changpas' economy revolves around their sheep, goats and yaks which are also used as measures of exchange and wealth. For example, a horse can be exchanged for two yaks and one yak can be exchanged for ten sheep or goats.

Changpas are primarily meat eaters, the meat being supplied daily by their livestock. They relish yak meat the most. They show surprise when they find someone eat vegetables. They are very fond of *tsampa* and also take salted butter tea. They occasionally eat blood. The steaming kettle is always boiling. The dresses are colourful, prepared from cloth woven by themselves. They are very fond of jewellery and embroidered caps. Both men and women have their long hair in plaits.

They treat all types of ailments with their own herbal medicines. Only in case of serious trouble do they call a Amchi Lama. A remedy for severe cough is pricking of the ear. Severe

headaches and other kinds of pains are treated by cauterizing. These nomads are now members of an established industry, the soft woolly-down called *pashmina*, is picked by them from the long hair of the goats and taken to the Kashmir valley where it is processed into multi-coloured thin shawls. In its pure form, *pashmina* is so fine that the entire shawl can pass through a wedding-ring. These shawls fetch very high prices. *Pashmina* formed the most important item of trade until the 1950s and entire caravans used to move along the ancient trade routes and over the highest road in the world to carry *pashmina* and other goods.



The rugged terrain of Ladakh

permissiveness, the tendency to have as many sex partners as one likes is difficult to check. In this tribal society, few ask a woman who the father of the child is. I recall that when I was on Everest, I casually inquired a young woman in Solo Khumbu the whereabouts of the father of the chubby-cheeked child, who was playing in the snow, she just giggled and did not feel obliged to answer.

Fertility and its symbols mean a lot to these tribals. The goat, for instance, is a symbol of fertility. One reason for the virtual worship of goat is that it is the only sure-footed animal that can endure in this terrain. Cows and horses simply cannot last. Moreover, the Drogpas or Brogpas, as these tribals are called, have imposed a taboo on cow's milk. Indeed, not only do they never drink its milk, but they also do not like it entering their village, so much so that they consider the cow as unclean an animal as the Muslims regard a swine. They depend on goats for milk and meat. A close look at their place of worship, usually a spot under the cover of a rock, reveals the existence of a large number of skulls and horns of goats and sheep, which have been sacrificed as offerings. Animists initially, they now follow a mixture of animism and Buddhism. They do not have temples or monasteries. Their method of disposing off their dead is also rather strange.

They bury their dead as if they were Pharaohs from Egypt's ancient civilization. They fill earthen or metallic pots with fine wine and food, depending on their financial status, for the journey into the next world. Bows and arrows are also placed near the dead to protect them from wild animals and other dangers in the course of this onward journey. Droga graves are distinct from Muslim graves. These are just stone walls about a metre high around the dead body which is placed on the ground and covered with slated stones. I could find only one Sunni Muslim family in Gorkon village. In all the other villages, Shia Muslims dominate.

These Aryan tribals do not have the Mongolian features so commonly present in this mountainous region. They are tall, well-built, with large eyes and sharp aquiline noses and full beard. Their women are also extremely beautiful. The men, women and children wear heavy metallic ear-rings through holes pierced in their earlobes. Again, all, irrespective of sex and age, wear long pigtails and cover their heads with colourful caps decorated with wild flowers. Their clothes, made from home-spun wool sheared off from their sheep, are also colourful.

The Drogpas are believed to have migrated via Gilgit about 1,000 years ago from Central Asia. There are no documents in the village to suggest their exact origin or history but the general belief is that they fled from Central Asia, when it was embroiled in the turmoil of warring chieftains. They obviously found peace in their present settlement and have continued to live here as a closed and insular society.

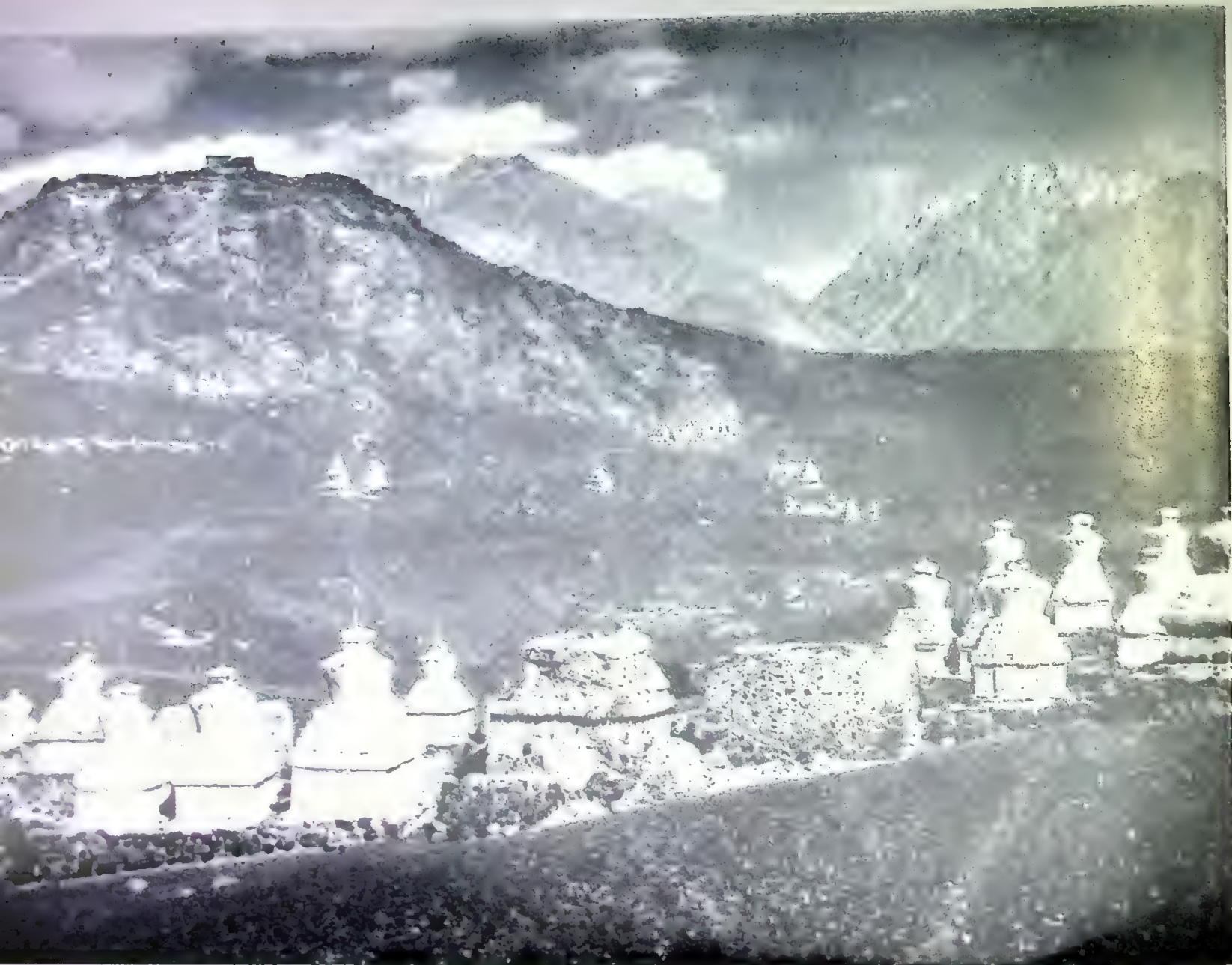
They have their own customs and festivals. For instance when a boy is to be married, he has to find his bride from one of the Droga villages only. If anyone marries outside the village, he is disowned by the community. For marriage the groom's maternal uncle takes a needle and thread to bride's house and gifts of butter and *tsampa* while negotiating the matrimony. The significance of carrying the needle to bride's place could not be ascertained from them. After the marriage has been finalized, the bride's mother gives rings and ornaments to her daughter. These ornaments are mostly of silver and made in the village itself. When the girl comes to her husband's place a community feast takes place. The entire village joins the dancing and singing programme which goes on for three days during which they drink *chang* and enjoy themselves.

Sonam Dig, headman of the Da-Hanu villages said that the maximum number of children in a family were two. Some families had only one child while others had none. In fact

Highest road in the World



(Sketch by Sven Hedin, 1901)



On way to the Nubra valley

I looked forward to driving over, what is perhaps the world's highest road. The feeling of expectation and thrill stemmed from the fact that this certainly was the highest road in the world when it was first used as a bridle-path to enable trade between eastern Turkistan and India. This road was called the "Treaty Road" or the "Caravan Route." It was a duty-free corridor for trade items like silk, wool, pearls, gold and silver in the shape of a horse-hoof called *yam-boo*. The trade between Leh and Central Asia around 1920, was valued at Rs 9.3 million. This gives an idea about the quantum of trade during the early part of the century on the Treaty road.

Starting from Leh, we passed the Ganglas village, (4,200 metres) the highest in Leh valley. The road then rises to reach Khardung-La, the highest point on this Treaty road and then passes through a glacier to dip into the Shyok valley. The scenery is enchanting all around. The road, after crossing the Shyok river enters the Nubra valley and then proceeds along the Nubra river

Nubra Valley

The Nubra river originates from the Siachen Glacier discovered by Longstaff in 1909 in north-west Ladakh. The road now takes you to Panamik, the last village on the Treaty road. It is considered the largest camping ground for caravans in the Nubra valley. Nubra means garden or green valley. It lives up to its name as evinced by the numerous orchards of apples and apricots. The chief crops here are wheat, barley, peas, millet, buckwheat and onions. It is drained by the Shyok and the Nubra rivers and has much better climate than Leh. Ninety per cent of its population is Buddhist. Rest are Muslims. Situated on the old caravan route, this beautiful fertile valley was an important halting place for the caravans. Much human endeavour has gone into making it fertile. Fields have been cleared of stones and not a drop of water is permitted to go waste.

The most sacred *mantra*, *Om mani padme hum* is engraved on several rocks and big stones. The *mantra* means "Glory to the jewel in the lotus"—jewel the *Atman* (soul) is seated in the lotus (heart). The houses are decorated with long flags with prayers written on them. They are very similar to those in the Solo Khumbu region on the way to Everest. An innovation in this region are the miniature water-wheels which ceaselessly turn the prayer drums. The valley's natural splendour, its picturesque beauty, the simplicity of its inhabitants, their contentment, and *joie de vivre* produce an unforgettable impression on the travellers. It is indeed a haven for a poet or an artist.

We were lucky enough to visit Nubra. And what a beautiful valley this is! Although the long journey over tortuous roads is bone-rattling, the fatigue vanishes on seeing the beauty of Nubra, rightly described by travellers of yore as the world's most beautiful valley. We saw villages along the Shyok and Nubra rivers against the spectacular background of rows of tall willows and poplars, their leaves turning from green to crimson to yellow to gold. Water is plentiful here. We crossed many streams on our way. The women here are more beautiful than those of Leh. We also noticed that the ancient mani-walls and Buddhist carvings are still intact, mainly because tourists are still forbidden from entering this region. We were entertained with nice songs and dances performed by little school girls in the open, beside the willow trees.

Of the five big monasteries and ten small ones in Nubra, Deskit is the oldest. It is 500 years old. Sumoor *gompa* was built some 250 years later and then came Samstanling and other *gompas*. Bholi went to Deskit *gompa*. So steep is the climb to reach this monastery that it took her one hour to climb it! But the hardship is worth taking the trouble. For Bholi speaks

excitedly of the breathtaking view she got from the top of the Panamik village at a distance, the Sumoor *gompa* and almost the entire Nubra valley. She could even trace part of the Treaty road, which leads to Kashgar.

Deskit *gompa* is one of those rare *gompas*, that displays the arm of a man who came from Central Asia years ago and proclaimed himself as the owner of this land. The arm was cut for making a false claim and was stored with the help of preservatives and looks jet black. None knows the exact legend surrounding this bizarre exhibit and its origins remain shrouded in mystery.

Of interest was my brief encounter with Khunna Khan, an old timer, who once made a living off the caravan route. He showed me, with pride, his pair of double-hump camels. "They can carry six maunds at a time," he said. And this means of transport is almost fuel-free—once the camels are left in the nearby forest after the day's work is done, they graze all night and dutifully report for work the next morning.

Later, we visited the hot spring around the Panamik village, which is known for curing diseases such as stomach pain, headache, ulcers, skin diseases and rheumatism. Many people come here from far off places for water treatment.

But to carry on with our journey beyond Nubra along this historical road, one can well imagine the hardships and privations that the early pioneers must have suffered in finding this route through a forbidden land. Without maps and charts to guide them, they could have gone only by a prayer on their lips, faith in their hearts and their eyes on the stars above to guide them. Many must have perished in this hazardous venture. The physical conditions of travel in this region remain much the same even today, the major difference being that we have the advantages of knowing that there is a laid-out route for us.

The traders also displayed great ingenuity in bridging the gap between the narrow mountain ranges or a gorge by piling boulders over boulders till a kind of bridge was made. Many such bridges still exist today on this route. The caravans would then proceed along the Nubra river, pass the majestic Saser Kangri massif and then on to the Depsang plain which was the despair of traders and travellers because of its inhospitable terrain. The soil here remains frozen throughout the year and the area is lashed by high velocity winds and blizzards most of the time. In his book *Moved On*, P.S. Nazaroff describes:

Hour after hour we rode on. The cold, penetrating wind became stronger and stronger...making respiration harder than ever. It blew right through my fur cap, chilled my head, making it ache desperately, and filled my eyes with dust. My lips, swollen and blue, cracked and blood oozed out. My eyes were inflamed. I tried to wrap my mouth up, as the Kirghis do, but it was useless. The wind blew through everything. My whole body ached; my heart was pounding violently, and the taste of decay in my mouth grew worse and worse.

A further journey of two weeks, brings you to Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO). Daulat Beg, a Yarkandi trader of yore died here and lies buried alongside his wife and child. "Oldi" means "gone to heaven." Some distance away is the Karakoram pass, the gateway between India and Sinkiang.

"If any road in the world deserves the name of Via Dolorose, it is the Caravan road over the Karakoram Pass connecting Eastern Turkistan with India," writes Sven Hedin. "Like an enormous Bridge of Sighs, it spans with its airy arches the highest mountain land of Asia and of the world."



The Majestic Saser Kangri massif.

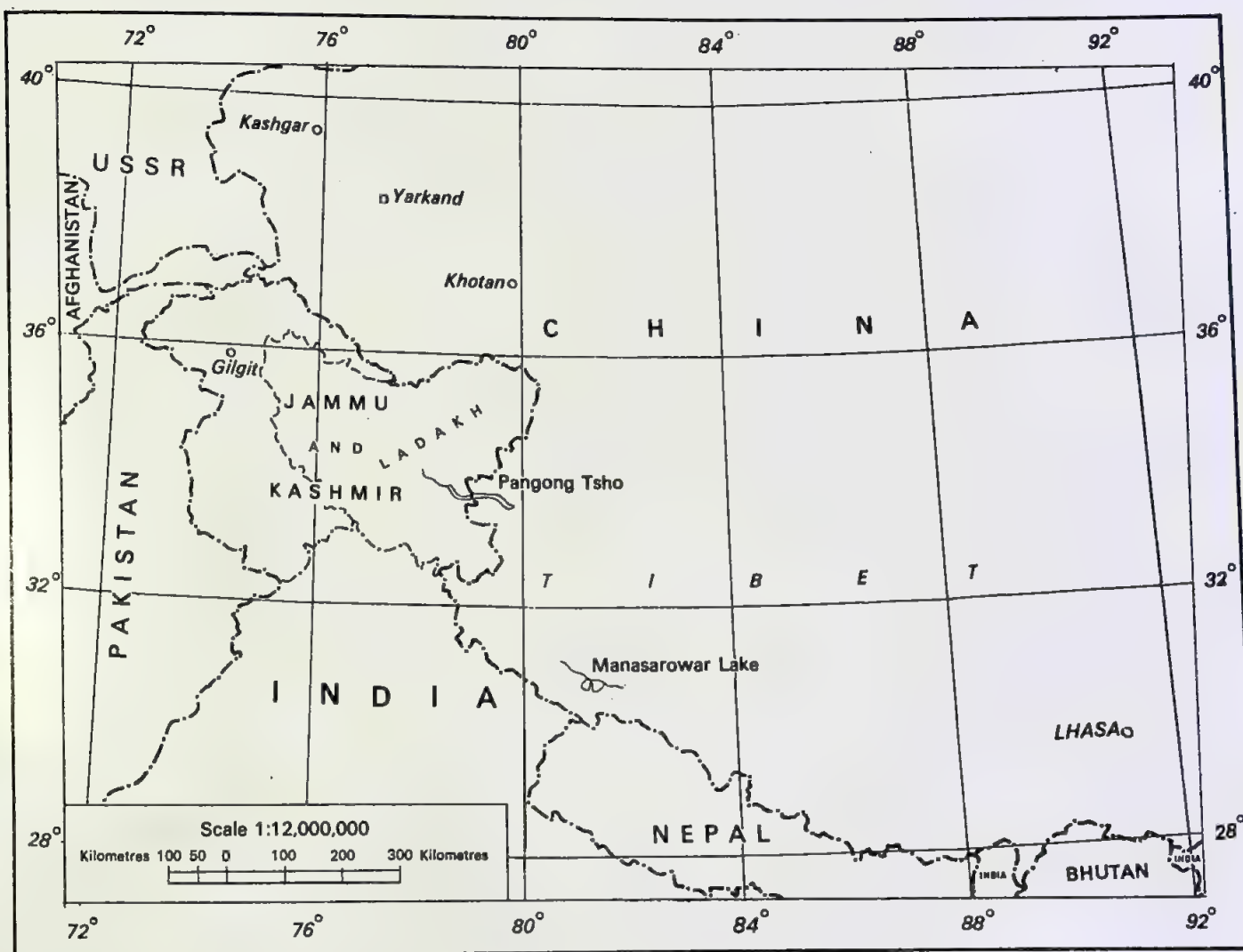
The land-locked Sinkiang had restricted outlets for trade with India. One of the most important route was the famous "Silk Route" from Kashgar to Gilgit over the Hindu Kush via Nagar and Hunza. The other route from Kashgar via Yarkand and then over the great Karakoram range bifurcates to two destinations—one to Skardu (which used to be the winter capital of Ladakh), and the other to Leh. It was here that during the revolution in the 1950s, the refugees from eastern Turkistan crossed over into Ladakh, the prominent among them were Mohmmmed Amin Beg Bughra, Governor of Turkistan and Mohammed Isa Affendi, a Turki minister. There was no trade route between Sinkiang and West Tibet because of the Gobi desert which was a big obstacle for the traders to circumvent.

On an average, a caravan covered thirty to thirty-five kilometres a day, which to my mind was remarkable. On our expedition, with all the modern amenities, we usually cover on approach marches twenty to twenty-five kilometres a day when the route is easy. When the route becomes difficult the expedition can do no more than fifteen to twenty kilometres a day.

From the pass one comes down to the upper basin of the Yarkand river, beyond which the route lies on much sturdier ground. From here, one enters eastern Turkistan, now known as



Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Shiva, Tibet



Based upon Survey of India map with the permission of the Surveyor General of India.

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Sinkiang. Descending from the Karakoram pass, it is a comparatively easy journey to the famous Central Asia towns of Yarkand and Kashgar. It takes almost five weeks for a traveller to reach Yarkand and another week to reach Kashgar. Both Yarkand and Kashgar have great similarity to Leh. They are dry and dusty, with barren mountains as in Ladakh, the rainfall almost negligible and the climate in general similar to that of Leh.

The Yarkand oasis is very fertile and well irrigated. With plenty of water, Yarkand has an abundant harvest. There are patches of rice fields and the farmers grow some fruit too, especially juicy and fragrant melons.

An unusual physical feature of Yarkand women is their inordinately developed bosom, disproportionate to their height and figure. It is said that there is a spring in one of the villages in the valley, whose water is reputed to have the power of developing the female bosom. This spring attracts women from great distances. Some European travellers wanted to develop this spot as a world health resort for women.

It is almost a week's journey to Kashgar from Yarkand. "Heart of Asia," as it used to be known, Kashgar is a remote place surrounded by high mountains and deserts. The only conveyance known at one time was the camel or the horse. Even as late as the beginning of this century, life remained as it was centuries ago. The town is surrounded by ancient walls, with



Approach to Kashgar

huge gates which are shut at night and reopened in the morning, the keys being kept in the custody of the local headman.

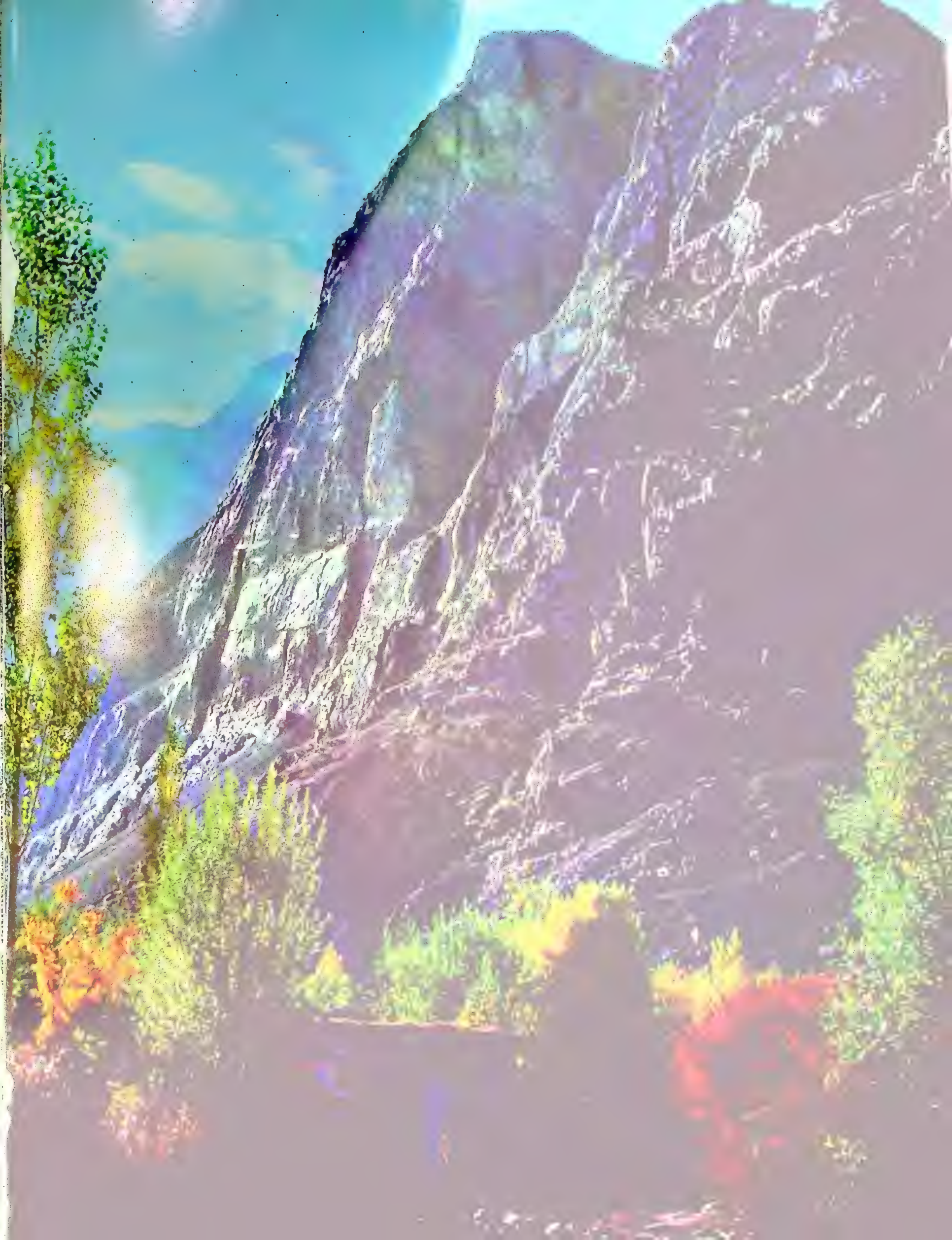
A popular prayer here is the prayer for rain, usually in winter when the snow-fall is very little. The *mullahs* conduct the prayers on request from the public and sometimes under orders from the local headman. It is said that once a *mullah* prayed too zealously, resulting in a heavy down-pour, which caused the collapse of well constructed houses and many deaths. The disaster brought many complaints to the local headman, who was asked to punish the *mullah* if the rain did not stop. The *mullah* then had to perform a different kind of prayer to stop the rain. This unusual ritual of praying to God was witnessed by Marco Polo, 700 years ago, when he passed through this ancient city.

It will be interesting to note that the game of polo had its origin in this place and according to tradition developed in the days of King Afrasiab around 500–600 BC.

Kashgar is easily any male visitor's delight. Should he enter this oasis without his wife, the law requires him to marry within three days or quit. This temporary or short contract marriage, called *mutah* is performed by a *mullah* in any of the innumerable mosques. It is not considered a sin as it is in accordance with the *Shariat* (Muslim law). Hardly is the wedding feast over, when the *mullah* reads out the ceremony of divorce also, in case the traveller has to move on after a brief halt, thus making the whole affair very simple indeed.

The intention behind this law, made during Yakub Beg's reign from 1865-76 and still in force till as late as 1950, was to prevent adultery. For the convenience and choice of visitors, the "temporary brides" paraded freely in the morning, selling milk or some such commodity. Exempt from this law was my friend, the late Eric Shipton, then British Consul-General in Kashgar. "I wish the Consul-General was not outside the scope of this law. I could have found a beautiful Turki woman for myself," he told me, a naughty expression on his wizened face. His wife, Diana, looked at him knowingly and laughed in good humour.

I regard Eric not only as a great mountaineer, but also a great traveller and explorer. It









Old man from village Dēskit, Nubra.

under, Nubra.

alley against the Karākoram Range.



Smile from Panamik, the last village on the Treaty Road, Nubra Valley.







Double hump camels on the old Treaty Road to Kashgar.



The town of Kashgar surrounded by ancient walls

was with deep sorrow that I learnt about his death, shortly after he visited us. I had already begun work on this book, when he very kindly called on me at my residence in New Delhi with his wife. I fully share the sentiment expressed by London's *Sunday Telegraph*: "I believe that just as Mont Blanc looks larger the farther one is from it, so Eric Shipton will grow in stature as he recedes into history. They will still be recalling him when they are climbing those mountains on the moon." To my mind, his contribution to the discovery of new routes to mountains and to remote places in Central Asia is great.

When Eric was appointed the British Consul-General to Kashgar in August 1940, he left with a caravan carrying stores that would meet the requirement for almost two years. His journey across the Karakoram pass on ponies and camels took over two months. A man with such fantastic travel experience is bound to be full of exciting tales and anecdotes. And so Eric Shipton was.

Here is an example of Eric's graphic description of Kashgar, that can apply to almost any oasis in southern Sinkiang:

From a high bluff shaded by tall chenar trees, I look across a stretch of fields to the river. The lanes between the fields are flanked by willows. A constant stream of people passes along them; bearded men in turbans and heavy padded coats, young men in brightly coloured skull caps, singing lustily, women in tent like purdah garments. They are nearly all riding donkeys, for the Turkis never walk if they can possibly avoid it. Occasionally a camel caravan appears, lumbering slowly along with a deep clang of bells. The camels are strung together in a long line and always led by a donkey. To the left, across a sunken road there, is another bluff slightly lower than ours, so that I can look down into a walled orchard of peach and apricot trees, and occasionally watch my neighbour, a rich man apparently, entertaining his friends with feast and music.

The post of British Consul-General in Kashgar was created by Sir Younghusband in 1888 and was held for twenty-five years by Sir George MacCartney. The object was to look after the trade across the Karakoram pass of the traders from Kashmir, and to protect the interests of the Indian trading community settled there. The post was usually held by a member of the Indian Political Service, and the only outsider was Eric.

During his stay in Kashgar, Eric took every opportunity of doing some climbing with Lakhpa Tenzing and wrote his famous books: *Memoirs of that Mountain* and *Brief History of Sinkiang*. He returned to India in October 1942, and married Diana Channar. The government again offered to post him to Kashgar. Thrilled by the prospect of accompanying Eric on his exciting assignment, Diana decided to leave their nine-month old baby in a home in England. When the Shiptons began their journey to Kashgar, the political situation was quite bad because of the Kirghiz revolt. But it had subsided when their caravan reached the Karakoram pass and they felt relieved that they had a safe journey to Kashgar, untroubled by rebels. Eric stayed in Kashgar as the British Consul-General till the partition of India in 1947.

Rinzing and Lakhpa Tenzing, were the two sherpas, who had accompanied Eric on many expeditions, including one to Mount Everest. On inquiring about Rinzing, I was told that he went first to Nepal and then to Lhasa. Meeting him was evidently not possible. With great difficulty, I succeeded in tracing Lakhpa, who had spent some time in Kalimpong in West Bengal in the shadow of the serene Kanchenjunga, but had finally chosen to settle in Leh. Lakhpa had accompanied Eric as a member of his personal staff as far back as in 1940, when Eric was first appointed the British Consul-General. Therefore, Lakhpa was only too happy and willing to undertake any adventure with Eric whom he respected tremendously as a climber, explorer and leader.

It was thus that Eric and Lakhpa set out for Kashgar through Karakoram pass. "The route was very difficult," recalled Lakhpa who now runs a flourishing travel business in Leh. "A fierce wind was blowing. In these inhospitable conditions, we were forced to spend three nights in the open." "Brrr." he said, a shiver ran down his spine on merely recalling those freezing cold hours. On top of all this, Chinese troops had surrounded their caravan on the left bank of the Mintaka river in October, 1940. They were captured by the Chinese. "They released us only to seize us again at Tashekurghan and detain us for four days," Lakhpa said. But his happiest memories are those of the beautiful Turki girl he married in 1940.

Khuma Khan was a bold and bewitching lass. She had run away from home when her father wanted her to marry a forty-year old policeman. Khuma was only fourteen and resented the idea of marrying someone almost thrice her age. Her father who was the headman of the village could not do anything as she left his house at Faizabad and came to Kashgar, a day's march from there. Here, Khuma sold watermelons and did some laundry work for the British Consulate. Her mother joined her shortly thereafter.

Lakhpa saw Khuma and fell for her. "Will you marry me?" he asked her. But the hot-blooded Khuma spurned his offer. "You had better wash your face in the nearest river and then come to me," she snapped at him. But this was not to deter Lakhpa, who was used to face challenges. "I will neither wash my face in the nearest river nor marry any other girl except you," he told her. His persistence and frankness appealed to Khuma. She said "Yes, I will marry you." But another hurdle had to be crossed. She was a Muslim while he was a Buddhist. Her mother wanted him to embrace Islam. But Lakhpa would not change his religion. He asked Khuma to become Buddhist. She was also not willing for this. A compromise was then worked out. Accordingly, it was decided that neither Lakhpa nor Khuma would change their religion. But the girls born from the wedlock would follow Islam and the boys would follow

Buddhism. The marriage was solemnized in a court as Lakhpa would not permit a *mullah* to marry them in a mosque. They had two daughters and two boys. The girls are married in Muslim families in Leh. The boys are Buddhists. One of them is in Leh, while the other is studying in Delhi.

When it was time for Eric to leave, Lakhpa Tenzing decided to stay back as he was very happy there. Besides, M.C. Gillet, who took over from Eric, wanted him to stay. So did Smith who succeeded Gillet. Lakhpa Tenzing's services were especially valued because he was well conversant with the Turki language and knew all the local customs. Moreover, Lakhpa's contacts with people at various levels were really enviable. One such contact proved extremely



Lakhpa Tenzing and his Turki wife, Khuma Khan

useful in a situation where Lakhpa was almost arrested on suspicion of being an Indian spy. It happened when he was escorting Eric to Gilgit in 1948. India had been partitioned. Gilgit was under the control of Pakistan and Eric was on his way back from Kashgar to England. The political agent of Gilgit, who was told by some of the Muslim staff accompanying Eric that Lakhpa was an Indian spy, issued orders for his arrest. These orders were to be implemented by the Hunza chief, Mir Jamal Din. But Jamal Din felt obliged to Lakhpa for some service that the latter had rendered to him, probably in a climbing expedition. Jamal Din sent word secretly to Lakhpa that he should immediately flee Misgar where they were staying. Lakhpa's first reaction was to meet Eric to bid him farewell. "If you do that, they will arrest you and kill you" Lakhpa was warned. So, in the dead of the night, Lakhpa set out on a fine Bukhara horse provided by Jamal Din. He rode like the wind, skilfully, avoided shots fired at him and succeeded in crossing into Chinese territory and reached Kashgar. He stayed there for five years till the Chinese took over the Indian consulate.

Lakhpa again faced trouble. The Chinese told him that he was free to go. But he could not take his wife and two daughters as they were Turki citizens of Chinese Sinkiang. Here again, Lakhpa's intelligence and presence of mind helped him plan "the great escape." He asked the Chinese authorities to give him a week to wind up his business affairs and make some travel arrangements. This was granted. But he outwitted the Chinese by leaving that very



Office of the Consulate-General of India in Kashgar.

night with the entire family. The journey to freedom was not easy. "Ill equipped as we were, we had to face blizzards while crossing a glacier. We were extremely hungry and exhausted. Only our determination to reach Leh saw us through," Lakhpa recalls. With gratitude does he remember the food and tea given by some up-country tribals whom he met by chance.

The Chinese aggression in 1962 disrupted life and business in Leh. So Lakhpa sent his family to his sister's house in Kalimpong while he continued to stay in Leh. In Kalimpong, his family began manufacturing mountaineering equipment. Later, he set up his present travel business in Leh. Lakhpa is a jovial and witty person whose jokes have your sides splitting with laughter. Lakhpa often reminds me of my Everest climbing companion Phu Dorji, whose amiable disposition and good humour endeared him to all.

Lakhpa is sixty-six years old now, but he looks much younger and his heart is full of love for the mountains. He retains the yearning for adventure and exploring new and unknown regions. The child of the Himalayas that he is, Lakhpa never hesitates to tell youngsters that the spirit of adventure must always be kept alive. He never tires of talking about the great Himalayas and the Ladakh Himalayas to all who like to listen.

Himalaya

The name Himalaya is derived from the Sanskrit word *hima* which means snow and *alaya* which means home. The Himalayas stretch from east to west across a distance of approximately 2,500 kilometres, twice as long as the Alps. The beauty and majesty of the Himalayas have been praised by poets and writers even in the oldest Indian writings such as the Vedas and the Puranas. Two Sanskrit tributes to the Himalayas are translated thus:

A hundred divine epics would not suffice to describe all the marvels of the Himalayas. Where shall he who has seen the marvels of the Himalayas find fitting words of praise for the Creator.

Kalidas, the great Indian poet of the fifth century AD, wrote in his masterpiece *Meghdut*:

The Himalayan winds that plunder many a flower and hasten, nectar-sweet, onward toward the south, cool my hot breast, delighting with the thought that once, perhaps, not long ago they touched thy limbs.

It will be convenient to divide the Himalayas into three regions: the eastern which is Sikkim, the mid-region of Kumaon, and the north-western which is Ladakh. But the chief axis runs horizontally through all the sections. East of Nepal it strikes into Tibet very close to the source of Tsanpo, is soon pierced by the gorge of the Sutlej and beyond it forms the southern



Children of Ladakh Himalayas

watershed of the huge Indus valley. In the west, this great rampart is known as the Zaskar range. This range separates Ladakh from Kangra district, Lahaul and Spiti. This lofty Zaskar range blocks the inward flow of the monsoon and once the Zoji La is crossed, the character of the country changes completely. There are no more forests and green pastures.

The Ladakh Himalayas are relatively unknown. Only a dozen peaks have been scaled so far. The four principal chains stretching over hundreds of kilometres are Saser chain, the Zaskar chain, the Stok chain and the Ladakh chain. The Saser chain forms part of the Karakoram mountain and has some of the highest and most difficult peaks like Saser Kangri, 7,672 metres high; Saser I, Saser II and Saser III are 7,415 metres, 7,513 metres and 7,495 metres high respectively. Access to these peaks is from the Nubra valley.

The Zaskar chain has the famous peaks of Nun, 7,135 metres and Kun, 7,085 metres high at the western end which are extremely popular with expeditions because of their rocky structure, altitude and glacial face. The other peaks are: Pinnacle peak, 6,930 metres; White

Needle, 6,600 metres; and Brahma, 6,416 metres high.

The Stok chain separates the valley of Zaskar from Indus. This chain is again very popular with the tourists and not very difficult to negotiate. Its mountains are: Meru (near Hemis), 5,709 metres; Kanjitse, 5,800 metres; Mashro West, 5,950 metres; and Stok Kangri, 6,120 metres high. There is also an unnamed peak fifty kilometres south of Leh which is 6,400 metres high.

The Ladakh chain is to the north of the Indus. It can be reached from Leh and Saspol. It is primarily a heavy mountain with a rocky face ideal for training in rock-climbing. It has mountains which are bare and eroded. It is completely desolated and barren and has peaks between 5,900 and 6,100 metres high.

The northern watershed of the Indus is the Karakoram range. The Karakoram range culminates in the north-west in the Mustang pass in a group of majestic peaks such as K-2, Gasherbrum and Masherbrum. Karakoram is a Turkish phrase which means "Black Stone." Loosely, the term is understood by people as "roof of the world." The highest peak in the range is K-2, 8,611 metres high. It was first observed by Montgomery in 1857. He gave it the survey name K-2 (Karakoram 2). The calculations he conducted on his observations, proved K-2 to be the second highest peak in the world. In 1861, a young British officer, Godwin Austen, penetrated into the vicinity of K-2 and made close observations from the glaciers. It is for this reason that the peak is also known as Mount Godwin Austen. The other important peaks on the range are Hidden Peak 8,068 metres, Broad Peak 8,047 metres and Gasherbrum II 8,035 metres high. The Karakoram range does differ a little in that it is less green and is unaffected by monsoon rains and thus remains quite dry.

Then to the north-west of the Karakoram range are the Hindu Kush mountains through which the armies of Alexander and later Babar (1518-19 A D) crossed into the Indo-Gangetic plain. The highest mountains of the Hindu Kush are Tirich Mir, Noshaq, Ister-o-Nal and Saraghrar. The mountains in Hindu Kush can be climbed with less technical equipment than other parts of the Himalayas and the weather is also not as hostile. It is for this reason that there are a large number of expeditions going into this area. There are about 200 peaks over 6,000 metres high. Hindu Kush lies on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The range has Oxus river, on one side and the Indus on the other.

When I climbed Mount Everest on 29 May 1965, I brought back a few pieces of rock from the summit. One such piece was of limestone, which was rather soft and flexible. A number of other summiters have also brought similar pieces of stone from the summit. A Japanese climber, Mr Naomi Uemura who climbed on 11 May 1979, brought back a piece of limestone which was so soft that one could stretch it with a minimum of pressure. Such pieces from the summit of Mount Everest were analyzed and the results have proved beyond doubt that Mount Everest was once under water. The studies conducted on the Himalayas also reveal that they are still rising due to continuing pressure exerted by the hard crust of earth from the north and the south of it. It is interesting to note that while other parts of the earth surface are withering away due to climatic conditions, the Himalayas are steadily becoming taller.

The Himalayas have an ancient history. In the course of centuries, many great empires arose both on the north and south of the Himalayas with the Indus valley being the cradle of a great civilization. There was Alexander's invasion which left behind its heritage of Hellenistic art and philosophy. Then there were invaders from the north—Mongols, Tartars and other nomads of Central Asia, who descended upon the valley.

When the trade routes from the north to south were opened through the Himalayas, explorers began to visit the high ranges of the Himalayas and the areas surrounding them. The

first westerner to visit Ladakh during the sixteenth century was a Portuguese layman named Diogo d'Almeria. During the seventeenth century and eighteenth century, Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries visited these areas purely as religious fraternities. The most important of these missionaries was, Ippolito Desideri, who came in the year 1715-16 to Ladakh and then went to Lhasa through Rudok.

The other religious fraternity was the Capuchins. The first Capuchin was John Francis of Camerino who, with five members, entered Lhasa via Nepal on 12 June 1707 to preach the gospel of Christ. They continued their missionary work till 1742 AD and built a church in Lhasa and also set up a belfry. When they abandoned the mission work, the church succumbed to the elements of nature and some hostile human elements. The church bell was removed and now it is to be found in the Lhasa Buddhist Cathedral with the Latin *Te Deum Laudamus* inscribed on it. During the period of thirty-five years of Capuchin evangelistic work, forty-four priests and five lay brothers laid their lives in Lhasa, in pursuit of their work. The most prominent among those priests who died was Father Francis Horace, the first European to compile a bilingual dictionary—Italian to Tibetan and vice-versa.

After Ippolito Desideri's visit, no European penetrated Ladakh for almost a hundred years. It was only in 1820 AD that two Englishmen, William Moorcroft and George Trebeck visited Ladakh on their own although they were the employees of the East India Company. They were the first to make an extremely valuable record of Ladakh and Central Asia. Alexander Cunningham, in his book on Ladakh describes Moorcroft thus:

The adventurous Moorcroft lived for two whole years in Ladakh from September 1820 to September 1822. His account of the country is marked by great shrewdness of observation and by the most scrupulous accuracy. A more truthful chronicler than Moorcroft never lived.

He did not get any patronage or any help from the government. He first made his way to the Chinese territory and then to the Kailash Mansarovar area from whence he made his way to the source of the Sutlej. He was born in Lancashire and educated in Liverpool. He was interested in horses and cattle at an early age, trained in veterinary science and successfully controlled an epidemic among cattle in his country. Since there was no veterinary school in London at that time, he went to France for further professional training after qualifying as a general surgeon, and earned a name as a veterinary surgeon.

In 1808, he was invited by the East India Company to improve the breed of horses for its cavalry. He always believed that Turkistan horses were superior to Arabian. It was his ambition to genetically improve the breed by selecting suitable stallions from Central Asia in the neighbourhood of Balkh and Bokhara. This was the prime motive of his journey across the Himalayas. He worked for a considerable time in Ladakh trying to teach the locals to improve their horses. He also trained them in better cultivation methods. While he obtained permission from the government for his journey, he was not granted any authority or political status. He undertook the journey entirely at his own risk and expense.

In Leh, Moorcroft was accused on more than one occasion for interfering in the internal affairs of the State which was against the interests of the British. Finally, he was asked to leave Leh. He reached Bokhara via Afghanistan and stayed there for nearly five months devoting his time mainly to equestrian studies and how to breed the best horses in Asia. Moorcroft had direct access to the Sikh ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He used to advise the Maharaja on the state of his horses and earned appreciation for his advice. The Maharaja had once shown him

his favourite horse, which he had purchased for Rs 7,000. Moorcroft told him that in his opinion it was an inferior horse. He went on to explain how to select a really superior thoroughbred and won the Maharaja's admiration. Moorcroft earned the gratitude of Maharaja Ranjit Singh for saving the life of his brother, Fateh Chand, who was pronounced dead by *fakirs* and Brahmins. Such was the morbidity at that time, while Fateh Chand was placed on the ground for his last rites, his wives prepared to offer *sati*, a dreadful custom in which women burned themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands. One of the wives was only fourteen years old. Moorcroft brought back Fateh Chand from the jaws of death and though he could have got almost anything from the overjoyed Maharaja, he declined the gifts of diamonds, precious stones and horses.

The circumstances of his death in Kabul are not known. It was rumoured that he had been poisoned when he fell among robbers who seized his property. Moorcroft's death is still a mystery although it has been stated that his German companion Trebeck had sent word in 1825 that Moorcroft had died on the road between Bokhara and Balkh. But the other story as given by Father Huc, a French traveller, is that Moorcroft did not die on the Afghanistan frontier in 1825, but made a secret journey to Lhasa in disguise as a Muslim and spoke fluent Persian. According to Father Huc, Moorcroft, hired a house in Lhasa and lived there for twelve years with his servant Nisan, whom he had brought from Ladakh and who also believed that his master was a Kashmiri. He made a number of drawings and geographical charts and also conducted a great deal of study on the herds of Tibet, particularly, the horse. Having collected all the records, Moorcroft set out to return to Ladakh, but on the way was robbed and assassinated. The authorities arrested the robbers and recovered the property which contained maps, charts and other data and established Moorcroft's identity.

Whatever the truth, there is no doubt that his reputation stood high among other travellers and his contemporaries. Moorcroft devoted much of his time and effort to trade, rural economy, and in particular, to improvement of cultivation methods. He had decided that after his mission he would settle in Ladakh and dedicate the rest of his life to rural uplift.

The Pundits

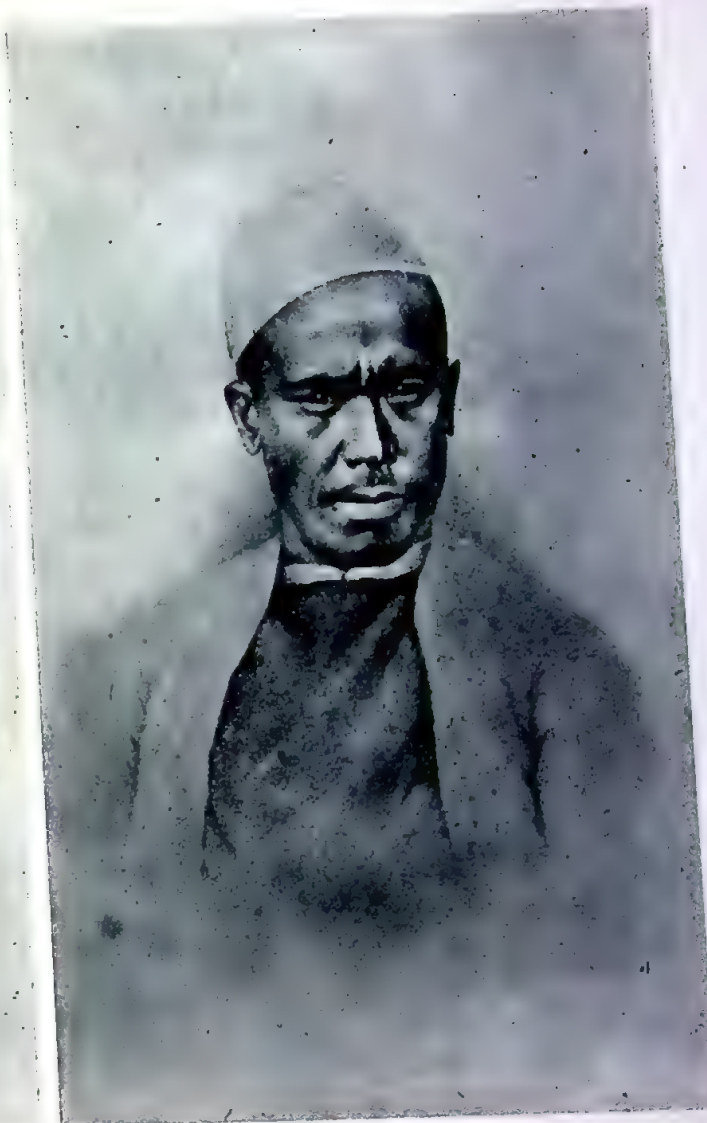
In the early nineteenth century, the British, having gained a stronghold in India, were upset at the growing might of the Czar, who was reportedly making contacts with Dalai Lama's government in Tibet and other parts of Central Asia. They were also aware of the fabulous gold mines and other growing trade prospects of Tibet through graphic descriptions of travellers' tales. However, even around 1850, the maps of Central Asia and Tibet were almost blank except for the pictorial Chinese maps. Several attempts by the British to penetrate into Tibet and to gain first-hand knowledge either openly or in disguise were repelled by the Tibetan government, which was ever suspicious of the British moves. It was Captain Montgomery of the Survey of India, who drew up a plan of training Indians, Tibetans, Nepalese and other border people in survey work and to send them across the borders in disguise to accomplish the task of map-making.

As part of this plan, two Indian brothers, Nain Singh and Kishan Singh, popularly known as the Pundits, became great explorers of the country. Their explorations were kept secret. They were called Pundits, because they were school teachers prior to their recruitment in to the Survey of India. Nain Singh was No. 1 (or the Chief Pundit) whose first cousin Kishan Singh was known as A.K. Both of them hailed from village Millam situated in the vicinity of Nanda Devi.

Harish Rawat, my climbing companion who stood with me on the summit of Mount



Kishan Singh



Nain Singh

Everest is the grandson of Kishan Singh. Over the years, Rawat has tried to compile the work done by Pundit Brothers from their sketchy accounts. It is understood that some pages of their diaries have either been lost or have faded away. The following account of the Pundits is primarily based on the researches of Harish Rawat.

How incredible it sounds today that these two brothers were the pioneer map-makers of Tibet and Central Asia, who went about counting their paces for thousands of miles at a stretch. The counting of paces was done by day and all details of the places visited, were scribbled by night. While doing this, they carried a rosary and a prayer-wheel like any Tibetan or devout Buddhist. All the papers connected with their survey were kept inside the prayer-wheel. They had rosaries with hundred beads instead of the usual 108 beads. Every tenth bead was slightly larger than the other beads. One bead was counted after hundred paces, the larger ones recording a thousand.

As lamas in disguise, they used to pretend to murmur the Buddhist *mantra*, *Om mani padme hum*. But in actual practice, they concentrated hard on counting paces and turned the beads to keep correct count of the distances covered. Disguised as a trader, Kishan Singh could not walk without inviting suspicion of the Mongol traders returning from Lhasa, as it was considered below his dignity for a trader to walk. So he rode a horse and ingeniously trained

himself to count the paces of his horse to calculate the distance covered by his travels to north-eastern Tibet and beyond to Mongolia. Two important items needed for their survey work were a small sextant and a telescope. At most of the places, they recorded the height above the sea-level by noting the time taken to boil water. It is really amazing to find that their maps, when checked with those made by modern survey equipment, are so accurate. The survey maps of these regions even today are based on the original work of the Pundits.

Nain Singh's last journey started in the year 1873-74 from Leh via Changthang, a vast grassland almost devoid of any habitation, to Nagchuka and thence to Assam via Lhasa, covering a total distance of over 3,000 kilometres. He visited the gold mines of Thok Jalung and Thok Daurakpa in western Tibet where gold was being extracted by digging. During this journey in the northern plains of Tibet, he had to manage without water for several days. The area is dotted by huge salt-water lakes. He carried all his food and other belongings loaded on goats and sheep, which also started perishing one by one for want of water, proper grazing land and the extreme cold. These he replenished wherever he could from the livestock of shepherds. He started his journey with some twenty goats from Noh village near Ladakh border and at his journey's end near Lhasa, he had the same number. This is a practical example of living for sheer survival and a lot can be learnt from the pioneer's experience. His valuable work was highly acclaimed during his life time and recognized by the Royal Geographical Society, London. He was awarded a gold watch and a Founder's gold medal. He was also given a *jagir* (estate) in Rohilkhand in recognition of his work and later given the title of CIE, that is, Companion of the Indian Empire.

Pundit Kishan Singh, son of Dev Singh, was born in September 1850. He got his training under Captain Montgomery and Pundit Nain Singh. He later achieved greater fame than his teacher and cousin. His first important journey was in 1872, when he made a route survey from Shigatse, north of Tsanpo to Tengri Nor Lake and while returning, reached Lhasa. This lake was a sheet of ice when he visited, measuring about eighty kilometres by thirty kilometres. He was of the view that Tsanpo of Tibet and Brahmaputra of Assam were the same river, but he could not conclusively prove it as he could not penetrate through the Indian border within fifty kilometres of Assam, due to the hostility of the tribals of that region.

In 1873-74, Kishan Singh made a 380 kilometre-long route survey of Yarkand and Kashgar. The most vital journey he made during this period was across Aksai Chin. He discovered that there was a direct route linking Turkistan with India which was free of snow in summer months—a vital piece of knowledge for trade and security of the country. Because of Kishan Singh's long absence from home, his close relatives took him to be dead, except his wife who never lost hope. After four years of absence, when all hope of his return was lost, he came back to the Dehra Dun Survey office looking like a ghost, with his health completely ruined, but with complete details of his travels. He received many honours from the government. He was given the title of Rai Bahadur and allowed to retire prematurely in 1885.

The most adventurous person with the Pundits was Kintup, who was responsible for solving the riddle whether the Tsanpo river which flows from Mount Kailash was identical to Brahmaputra river. To solve this riddle, a lama was chosen and trained. He had to throw pieces of marked wood into the river. If the rivers were identical, these pieces of wood would reappear at the other end. A careful watch would be kept to ensure that these wooden pieces were not lost. To assist the lama in this work, Kintup accompanied him. When the lama reached Lhasa, he disappeared and sold Kintup as a slave. Kintup managed to escape. Disguised and after facing great hardships, he managed to reach a point of the Tsanpo river, where he threw the marked pieces of wood in the river. He followed the course of the river for

50 kilometres from the frontier of Assam, but had to return as he could not find a way through the gorges. He returned to India by a different route, but he did complete his work. At first, the officials did not believe his story, but the maps of the river which he had made out of his memory confirmed his descriptions and his success in planning the work. He was later invited to Simla and honoured by the Viceroy of India for his magnificent work.

This type of adventure continued till the end of the last century and then a new era began. Mountaineers and explorers began appearing in the Himalayas both for the purpose of climbing and for exploration. Most of them came with definite motives. Among those well known are Henry Haversham, Godwin Austen and Alexander Cunningham. Cunningham visited Ladakh twice, first in 1846 and then in 1847 and along with others, fixed the frontiers between Ladakh and Tibet and later between Ladakh and Spiti. He also conducted his study on determination of the snow-line and cataclysms of the Indus and the Sutlej.

Later the famous German brothers, Adolf, Hermann and Robert Von Schlagintweit, came who conducted scientific investigations in Central Asia. Adolf was later murdered in Kashgar. During the course of their stay (from 1854-58, though in some books it is from 1855-57), they made observations from Sikkim and announced that "Everest was called Gauri Shankar in Nepal and Chingoponari in Tibet." The outcome of this was a great sensation. The Royal Geographical Society of London supported them and disagreed with the Survey of India. Thus, Gauri Shankar was acknowledged in the maps as the highest mountain in the world till as late as 1900. Later their sketches and observations were closely scrutinized by the Survey of India. It was discovered that the observation stations of the German brothers failed to disclose the peak, Mount Everest. From Phalut they had seen Makalu, and from Kaulia, Gauri Shankar. Mount Everest being relatively small when compared to these two mountains, remained insignificant from their observation post. Observations continued. It was finally in 1903 that Captain Wood, who entered Nepal to make observations from the two stations, established that Mount Everest and Gauri Shankar were two different peaks, almost fifty-eight kilometres apart. It is indeed a sobering thought that surveyors, of all people, could have missed Mount Everest, the world's highest peak!

Another famous name is that of the Swedish explorer, Sven Hedin, who conducted his study of Central Asia and Tibet in 1887 and visited Ladakh a number of times. As a result of his study, he wrote nine volumes of text and compiled three volumes of maps (mostly of Tibet) of his travels. He wrote his famous book *My Life as an Explorer*. When he was in Tibet (1906-08), he conducted his study on Mount Everest and subsequently published his work which brought out interesting facts about Everest including its local Tibetan name and the study conducted by French Jesuits of Peking in 1717.

Aurel Stein, Hungarian born, inspector of schools in Punjab, was next in the field. He wrote a number of volumes on archeological and geographical explorations which he conducted in Central Asia during 1906-08. He carried out these explorations, under the orders of the Government of India in remote parts of Central Asia and westernmost China. He conducted his study on the basis of experience he had gained during his earlier journey in Chinese Turkistan during 1900-01. His was the pioneering work in the sand-buried ruins of Khotan and Niya which was practically virgin land for antiquarian research.

Aurel succeeded in answering a number of questions as to why Indian relics were found in the north of the great mountain barriers in a country that was traditionally associated either with China or with Mongolia. As a result of his study, he discovered that the ruins of Niya were abandoned towards the end of the third century AD. He dug out hundreds of manuscripts, freshly preserved beneath layers of dry sand. It was here that he recovered a seal

in which Pallas Athene was portrayed side by side with the Chinese character and that these very seals were used on documents addressed to the Kushan kings, who ruled north India at that time. He also discovered that Niya, which looked barren and deserted, was at one time a place of temples, monks, soldiers, administrators, traders and travellers arriving from every part of the world.

Then we have Sir Francis Younghusband, who visited Ladakh a number of times. He entered the snowy regions of the Himalayas when he was in the Survey of India, and also visited the Karakoram mountain at the end of the last century along with Godwin Austen. His mission to Tibet in 1903-04 became a subject of controversy and is discussed by Peter Fleming in his book *Bayonets to Lhasa*. He wrote several books and died in 1942 at the age of seventy-nine.

It is the findings of Sir Aurel Stein and others that enable us to visualize how in the very heart of Asia, two great civilizations of the ancient world, the Chinese and the Greek, had approached each other gradually and at last met. As a result of the blending of these great civilizations here, the people of Central Asia evolved a culture of their own which was unique, and comparable to none in the world.



Sven Hedin, the Swedish explorer



A house in Deskit with hay stacked on the roof to provide insulation







River Shyok.

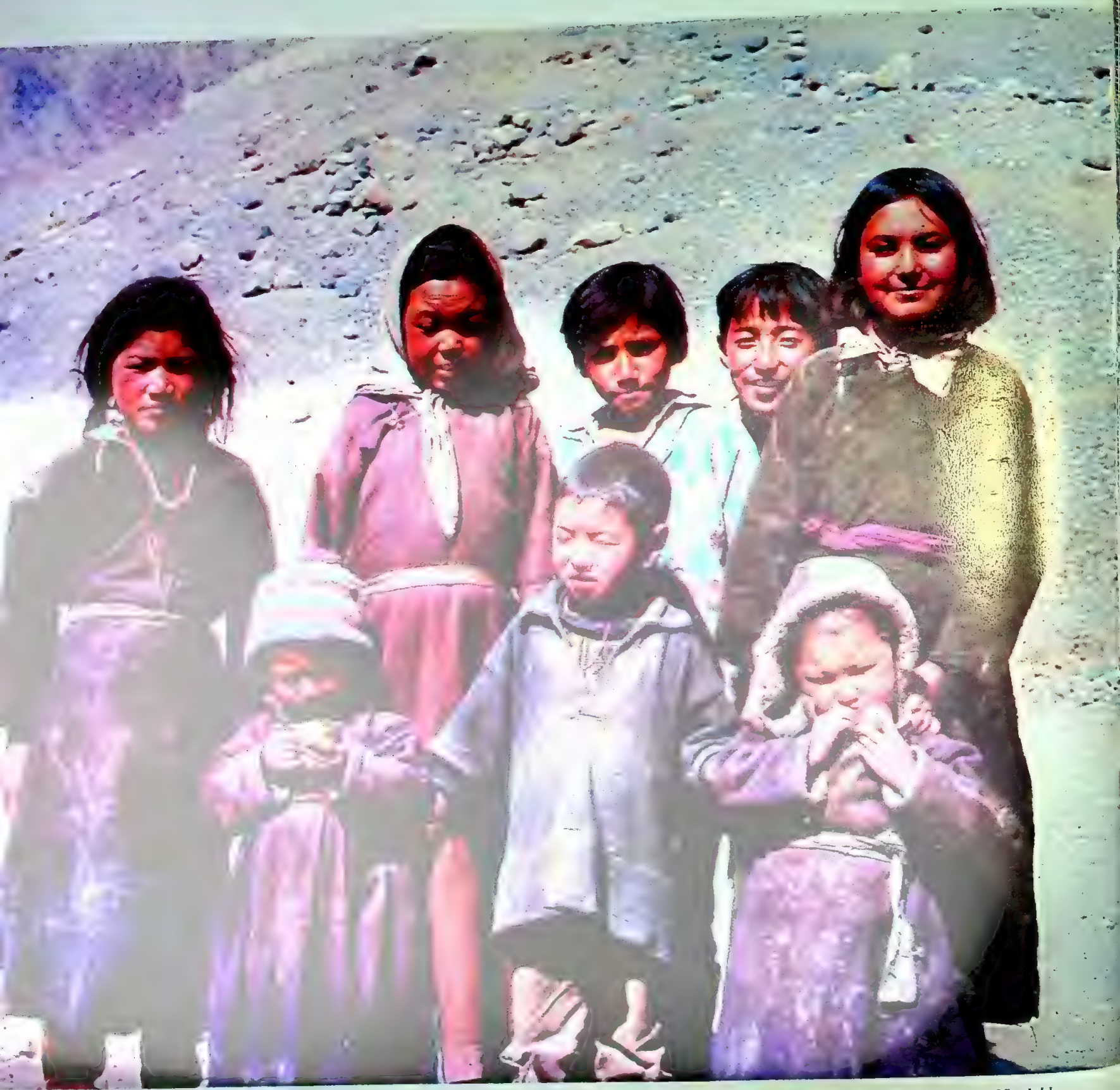


River Nubra

Pangong Lake, 136 kilometres long at a height of 4,550 metres, with the Tibetan border running along its eastern end.







The children of Ladakh.

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Jule





Jule

"Jule" is a sweet little word that symbolizes Ladakh's spirit of timelessness. It is used to greet people and also to bid good-bye. It is one word that you constantly hear in Ladakh, the one word that lingers in your memory long after your visit has ended. You will see groups of little children, filled with curiosity at the sight of visitors, joyously yelling "*Jule, jule*" as they run after your vehicle. You will see beautiful girls being greeted by handsome young Ladakhi boys with a loving "*Jule*" This little word is almost like the *chang* which Ladakhis drink on any pretext. Be it a wedding or a christening, a death or a farewell party, nothing is complete without those long bouts of drinking *chang*.

Jule also reminds me of a little joke I heard in Delhi. It was winter and a young Sikh boy, in order to keep the chilly wind out, wore his jacket the other way round—buttons at the back. Attired thus, he entered an office where a pretty receptionist was somewhat taken aback by the unusual sight. Just to tease him, she posed a question: "Before you tell me whom you wish to see here, will you tell me whether you are coming or going?" Both burst out laughing at this amusing sarcastic observation. *Jule* is therefore somewhat like the boy in this little story. It is a word that can be used on all occasions—a word with an infectious charm about it.

Bholi simply fell in love with this word. She used it to greet the beautiful day we awoke to. And there was a special reason for doing so. The weather office had forecast a cloudy day. And here it was, a bright and beautiful day, full of warmth and sunshine—a day that deserved to be greeted with a full-throated *Jule*. She expressed her belief that one must go out with an umbrella whenever the weather-office says it is going to be a bright day and leave it at home when a cloudy or rainy day is forecast.

Armed with her camera and accompanied by some Ladakhi women, Bholi set out for a nearby village on a shooting expedition. "*Jule,*" she said, waving her hand reminding me to wait for her at the Field Research Laboratory (FRL) around lunch time. After lunch, we had planned to visit the weather-office, the Moravian Mission and the library attached to it, the old Sanker *gompa* and then Shey village from where it is a great experience to see the sunset.

But let us begin with the FRL, which is easily the greenest spot in the Leh valley. Seen from a distance, the FRL looks like a beautiful oasis with lots of trees around a huge farm through which flows a small stream which comes from a nearby spring. Beautiful Ladakhi girls work in the FRL's vegetable and fruit gardens and glass-houses where plant growth is studied. It has built up quite a reputation for growing massive king cabbages, outsized potatoes, turnips and various other vegetables. The FRL is one indicator of change gradually sweeping through this quaint and sheltered civilization.

There has been a big leap from mule packs and bridle paths to jets and helipads. But change that affects society at large and impinges on the life-style of the people, has maintained a low profile in Ladakh. The impact of foreign tourists is, of course, visible with the young Ladakhis sporting mod hair-styles, and showing their fondness for Western pop music and dance in the crop of seedy discotheques that mushroom in summer time when the temperatures soar to about 25°C during the day. Traders who once dealt in Yarkand carpets and yak butter, now peddle fabricated "antiques" to foreigners and imported clothes bought off hippies, to the locals.

Field Research Laboratory

The most outstanding contribution in this area is by the Field Research Laboratory, set up initially by the late Professor Boshi Sen and run by the Defence Ministry since 1962. The major problem here was that just when a vegetable began to mature, the weather became

adverse and spoilt the crop. The short duration of the agricultural season—May to September—was the biggest limiting factor for the cultivation of vegetables. Lieutenant Colonel Jawahar Kaul, FRL Director, explained while showing me around the research station that there were two ways of solving this problem: first by introducing short-duration or quick-maturing varieties, and secondly raising soil temperature to force seed germination even when night temperatures were well below freezing point. Kaul, a cheerful officer, who hails from Kashmir and looks young for the rank he holds, said that the FRL extended the agricultural season by six weeks by covering the nursery beds with a film of black polythene to raise soil temperatures and to conserve the heat in the beds. With this simple innovation, it has become possible to grow practically all types of vegetables and also to grow long-duration crops or two quick crops. Through this technique, some thirty different varieties of fifteen vegetables are now being grown. This has resulted in a dramatic increase in production from eighty tons a year to thousand tons.

The strange feature of vegetables grown here, Kaul said, is their freak giant size which does not seem to affect their taste, texture or quality. The vegetables grow to gigantic sizes here because of the longer daylight and strong intensity of the ultra-violet rays. No wonder FRL has produced some unique exhibits like eight kilogramme king cabbage and radish, seven kilogramme cauliflower, seven kilogramme turnip, four kilogramme knobkhol and potatoes that weigh one kilogramme a piece. Improved varieties of fruit trees from the Uttar Pradesh Agricultural Research Station at Ranikhet have withstood the extremes of winter temperatures. It is now possible to cultivate improved varieties of apples, apricots, plums, peaches, walnuts and almonds in the area.

The FRL has designed and fabricated a solar drier for the speedy and hygienic drying of apricots which grow in abundance here and for which there is a good demand in the Indian market. Apricot-growers in a dozen villages are using these solar driers since 1975, with beneficial results. What is more, it is now possible to cultivate as many as forty varieties of flowers too. Trees like poplars and willows have been found to have as high a survival rate of eighty-five to ninety per cent if irrigation is provided. The growth of these trees on a large scale may help change the ecology of this cold desert. Beer lovers will be happy to note that hops, currently imported for beer production, have been grown successfully in Ladakh and hold promise of ending imports.

Some 8,000 hectares of land is under barley and wheat cultivation and another 4,000 under pulses and millets. High altitude hot-houses exploiting available geothermal energy have enabled inside temperature to rise as high as 20°C when outside it is freezing—30°C.

This has especially been successful in the Chumathang and Puga areas, where geothermal energy reserves are plentiful. According to Kaul, Ladakhi peasants are fairly receptive to the flow of these new ideas. Experiments are in hand to keep poultry birds warm in underground houses, when surface temperatures are below freezing point. Already, some 8,000 table birds are available annually by this technique, making it possible for people to consume fresh poultry meat in winter instead of eating the tasteless tinned stuff. It is possible to rear rabbits too here and organoleptic studies have shown a favourable reaction to the consumption of rabbit meat.

Cross-breed strains of jersey cattle also show great promise. An artificial insemination centre has been set up to effect large-scale genetic improvement. Milk production is likely to rise with these efforts from a paltry .25 to one litre of milk per head of cattle per day to twenty litres per head per day in cross-bred animals, giving an average of ten to twelve litres of milk per head per day. Russian Karakuli ewes and rams have been housed at the Khumbuthang

farm in the Kargil sector. Of 90,000 goats, 70,000 are *pashmina*-bearing. Efforts are on to increase the yield of *pasham* wool, the basic ingredient for the shawl industry.

On the mineral front, the Geological Survey of India (GSI) and the Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM) have found deposits of borax in Puga and Nubra valleys; sulphur, limestone (suitable for cement manufacture), sulphur-bearing gypsum, mica and copper in Leh, Suru valley and in the bed of the Zaskar river.

Bholi joined me at the FRL just as I completed my round of this fascinating high altitude research station. Kaul had laid out a special *tandoori* chicken lunch for us. The broiler was from the FRL poultry as were all the vegetables and cheese used in other dishes. If he wanted to show me how tasty the food from FRL could be, I certainly was impressed. Bholi did not eat a morsel of food. She was on a *Karva Chauth* fast and would not eat or drink even a glass of water. Women in north India observe a strict fast on this day for the long life, good health and prosperity of their husbands. They can break the day-long fast only after seeing the moon at night. Kaul knew that nothing he said or did, and not all those tempting dishes, would persuade Bholi to break a tradition maintained over generations by Indian women.

We said "*Jule*" to Kaul and drove to the meteorological station which is adjacent to the Alpha Mess. At 3,520 metres above the sea-level, it can boast of being one of Asia's highest observatories. It was set up in 1880, and an officer was appointed to take charge of the station for a period of two to three years. Later, the station was entrusted to the Moravian missionaries, who conducted the work till 1957, when they left. It regularly transmits meteorological data to Poona. I would like to say a word here about the Alpha Mess itself, before we go to the Moravian Mission.

Alpha Mess, located at one of the best vantage points in Leh from where one gets a bird's eye view of the valley, has enjoyed the privilege of being the official residence of the Dogra rulers and the British. Before 1834, it was a summer pleasure garden of the kings of Ladakh. It was a pavilion in which public functions were held. It was also the venue for dancing and archery competitions. Later, when the Dogras captured Ladakh, they converted it into their own residence and when the British came, it became the British residency. All the important people connected with the British *raj* and famous explorers and sportsmen and also the British officials going to Khotan, Kashgar and Yarkand used to stay here. Other VIPs of the State stayed at the Wazir Wazarats' residence, which is in the town and today is a *dak* bungalow.

We then passed by Hotel Everest, constructed by Sonam Wangyal on the land gifted to him on his success in scaling Mount Everest. Since he belongs to Ladakh, he was given land in Leh. I come from Punjab so the Punjab government has gifted me land in Chandigarh. Adjacent to Hotel Everest is the Moravian Mission with its tiny old church and a kitchen garden where the first experiments to grow good vegetables were conducted around the 1880s.

Moravian Mission

We then drove to the Moravian Mission which has a small cluster of residential quarters for the Bishop, the doctor and the visitors. It also has an impressive church built in the typical Ladakhi architectural design and a well-stocked library. The sisters' quarters are flanked by the residence of Bishop Peter and Dr Heber. Adjacent to the mission library is the residence of Mrs and Reverend Asboe. A Swiss national, Pier Vittoz, was the last European Mission incharge to leave in 1957. He was a mountaineer and had scaled Nun Kun in 1954.

There are only eighty-one Christians in Ladakh, of whom thirty-five are males, as per the 1971 census. Today, Ladakhi Christians maintain the Mission. We could not meet Stan Zin



Old observatory in Leh set up in 1820

Razu, the mission head, as he was out of station. But we had a look inside the church constructed in 1884 by Reverend Retslab. There are no chairs inside the church. People sit on carpets in the oriental style, very much like a Sikh *gurdwara* or a temple.

We also had a look at the Moravian Mission library. In spite of being in demand somewhat by book thieves, it can still boast of a collection of some ancient manuscripts collected by scholar missionaries like Heyde, A.H. Jaeschke, Dr Francke and books written and presented to it by famous travellers and explorers like Sven Hedin and Dr D. Fillippe.

Reverend A.H. Heyde and Pagell came to India in 1853 with the intention of opening a mission in Mongolia, but since the clergy did not get permission to pass through Russia, they went to Lahaul instead, and opened a mission at Keylong and later in Leh. They wanted to go to Mongolia because, according to the accounts of some travellers who had visited Mongolia, there was evidence both in the form of literature and monuments of early Christianity in the region and they wanted to make a detailed study of the subject. Since they could not go to Mongolia through Russia or any other country they thought it might be easier to enter Mongolia from north India via Ladakh, but they were not successful. It proved a blessing for the inhabitants of both Ladakh and Lahaul that permission was not granted to the missionaries to go to Mongolia and they established missions in the former regions. The Moravian missionaries, particularly the Germans, were not only zealous in preaching the gospel of Christ, but were also noted scholars and contributed greatly to the Tibetan language and literature. In particular Mr Jaeschke, Dr Marx and Dr Francke did a great deal of



Moravian church constructed in 1884 by Reverend Restlab.

research work on the culture and literature of Ladakh. Among their contributions are the Tibetan books, Tibetan-English Dictionary, Francke's *History of Western Tibet* and collections of ancient Ladakhi and Dardi songs, *Antiquities of Indian Tibet* (in two volumes) and last but not the least, translations of the *New Testament* and some books of the *Old Testament* into the Tibetan language.

Dr Francke was a linguist and historian. He collaborated with Reverend Joseph Gergan in translating the Bible into Tibetan. He also made a systematic study of rock carvings and inscriptions at different remote places in Ladakh, Spiti and Lahaul. He made a collection of ancient folk songs and translated the *Kesar Saga* which is an account of the kings of Ladakh, into English. Moravian missionaries set up a Litho printing press first at Keylong and later in Leh and brought out their first newspaper of Jammu and Kashmir state called *Ladakh's Phonya*. Besides their contribution to language and literature, they did pioneering work in agriculture, education and health. They also taught the locals the growing of exotic vegetables and how to improve their quality and taste. It is because of their early efforts that today Ladakh grows some of the finest vegetables in Jammu and Kashmir.

The missionaries introduced in Ladakh an iron cooking-stove which was redesigned by Reverend Gergan, to suit local conditions and is nowadays a must in every house in Ladakh. It not only helps to cook a meal quickly but keeps the rooms warm simultaneously.

Mrs Kunick, who along with her husband was looking after the Moravian Mission in the early part of the century, was aware of the low pressure of the altitude and difficulty in cooking. So, she developed a system of her own. The cooking was done in a special apparatus,



Moravian mission in Leh

something like Papin "digester," hermetically sealed in a pressure of superheated steam, which at this altitude replaced normal atmospheric pressures. The apparatus is screwed up and heated for a fixed time—something like a modern pressure-cooker.

The wives of the missionaries started schools and taught the local children and women knitting and sewing and helped them to earn extra money to add to the meagre income of the family. They also helped the local Christian students to go to Srinagar for higher studies. Joseph Gergan was the first Ladakhi to study in Biscos School at Srinagar, during the last decade of the nineteenth century. He later proved to be a scholar of Tibetan language and devoted his life to the translation of the Bible. To him also goes the credit of compiling the history of the kings of Ladakh in Tibetan which was recently edited by his son S.S. Gergan, who is also compiling another history of Ladakh with the title *A Gap in the History of Ladakh*. Another student sent by the missionaries to Srinagar was J. Dechen, who was the first Ladakhi graduate and later became the first deputy commissioner of Ladakh.

Moravian missionaries also opened a hospital at Leh where qualified doctors worked and which had facilities for in-patients. Dr Weber who was the head of the Moravian Mission in 1894, was also responsible for supervision of the meteorological observatories and the post-office at Leh.

Travellers used to give donations to the Mission, both in cash and kind. In 1908, the famous explorer, Sven Hedin, donated his gold watch which was worth Rs 150 at that time. A year later Sir Aurel Stein donated Rs 100.



Tomb Stone of Stoltitzsky an Austrian geologist in the European cemetery in Leh where many eminent explorers and missionaries lie buried.

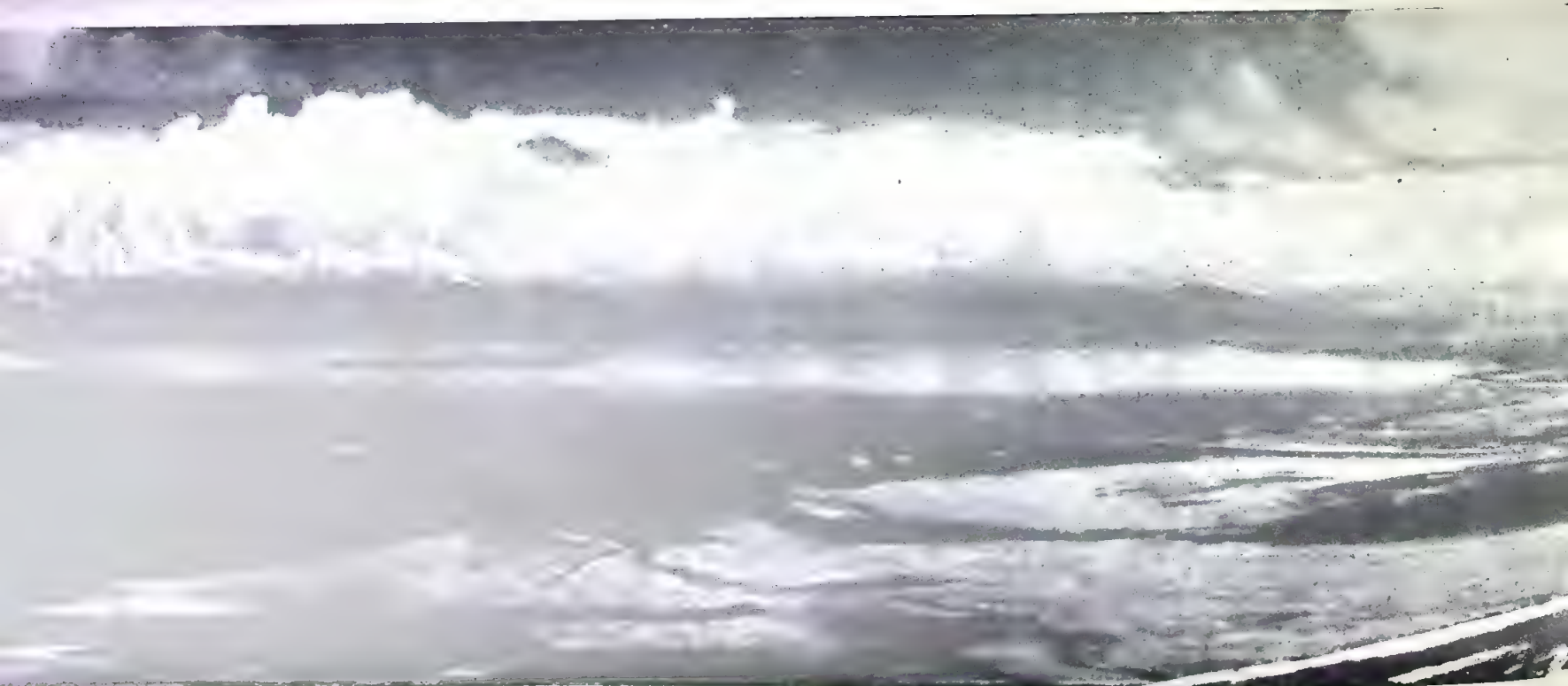
In the European cemetery nearby (mentioned in many old travellers' books) lie buried several European explorers and sportsmen and a Roman Catholic priest, who wanted to start a mission station at Leh. An eminent Austrian Geologist, Stoltitzsky who was buried here was honoured with a grave-stone by the British authorities. Stoltitzsky died in 1874 at Karakoram pass while conducting geological survey in the region. The Geological Survey of India and the Austrian authorities observed his death centenary in 1974.

We then drove to the hundred-year old Sanker *gompa*, located about two kilometres away, in the middle of wheat and barley fields. We were met at the gate by two fierce-looking Tibetan mastiffs. The *gompa* has an impressive facade and a golden wheel, supported by two deers depicting the first sermon of the Buddha at Sarnath. The present *Kushok Bakula* is the second incarnation. The Sanker *gompa* is the only *gompa* having a beautiful statue of Avalokiteshvara. Modest living quarters for lamas and nuns are provided in the two wings of this *gompa*.

From Sanker *gompa* we decided to visit Shey village. It was half an hour's drive from Leh. We made it just in time to see a glorious sight—the setting sun's rays from behind, striking the Shey monastery atop a hillock bathed in a shimmering red and blue. It seemed as if all its window-panes were like many mirrors, throwing back multi-coloured reflections. They dazzled like diamonds suspended from the sky. It was a sight fit for the gods. And from within the monastery came the sounds of the clash of cymbals, the drone of prayers said aloud, and the chanting of hymns. These were the only sounds that broke the evening stillness, creating a spiritual atmosphere. One felt that the deep humming sounds did not belong to this earthly world at all but to some ethereal world where humans were unknown.

We were so enchanted and spell-bound by the beauty of Shey, that we forgot for some time that we must return to Leh well before sunset, which is rather early in the day. There is no vehicular traffic on the road after 6 P.M. Should we be stranded for some reason, we would face problems. But we could not resist the temptation of spending some time in Shey—a quaint Ladakhi village on the right bank of the Indus river.

The river in front of the village flows in an open area and looks like a lake with multi-coloured vegetation floating on it. The ripples of water glistened in the distance, and we could clearly make out three distinct shades, ranging from light blue to deep blue. The village was humming with activity and most of the villagers were out in the fields threshing. The sun was setting behind one of the barren hills surrounding the village. The valley was being slowly enveloped in the darkness. The tops of the distant hills, were bathed in red and gold as the sun dipped low. Friendly villagers surrounded us and responded warmly to our many inquiries



about their way of life. They offered us their traditional salt and butter tea, which I enjoyed. Finally, we were back on the road to Leh.

We drove for some time. Suddenly, there was a jerk and our jeep came to a halt. Yes, it was a flat tyre. "Get the spare one," I told Lal Singh, my driver. He gaped at me rather sheepishly, "What's wrong?" I asked him. "Sir, in my hurry to reach you in the morning, I forgot to bring the spare wheel," he explained, trying to cover his embarrassment with a smile.

The trouble with Lal Singh is, that you can't say one harsh word to him. He simply disarms you with a smile which is more eloquent than any possible verbal explanation. He could well be saying "*Jule*". This is one of his qualities that has endeared him to me.

We had no choice but to wait and trust to luck for a vehicle to pass. Bholi took it cheerfully in the beginning. But when some time passed and still no vehicle came, she got restless. She must have been feeling dehydrated after the day-long fast and tired too, for it had been a hard day's work, especially on an empty stomach. I tried to scribble some notes in my pad, but it was so cold that I gave up this effort as the frozen tip of the ball-point refused to write.

To keep her interested, I explained to Bholi the importance of this road, originally the bridle-path for caravans going to Lake Mansarovar and Lhasa. In this region too is Mount Kailash, from where the Indus originates. Lake Mansarovar, according to the Hindu and Tibetan lore, is the most ancient lake in the world. This lake is mentioned in the Hindu epics—*Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, and is considered most sacred by the Hindus. General Zorawar Singh, in 1841, advanced along this very road to launch his intended attack on Tibet. Bholi's eyes brightened, when I told her that it was on this road that animal loads of gold used to pass from the gold-bearing belt of West Tibet.

Ultimately, our spirits rose as we spotted the headlights of an approaching vehicle. It was a jeep. Luckily, it had a spare wheel which the driver agreed to loan us. The two jeeps then drove together to Leh.

Lake Mansarovar, the most sacred and ancient lake in the world, West Tibet



It was good to be back in the warmth and comfort of the Alpha Mess. Normally, I drink beer. But tonight was different. I fixed myself a double shot of brandy and read a few pages from the book, *Kafirs and Glacier* by Schomberg. Bholi kept a glass of orange-juice ready. She could not drink it, till she glimpsed the moon. She had to go out in the cold a few times to spot it. Every minute seemed like an hour. It was only after a long torturous wait that the moon came out from behind a bare mountain. This enabled Bholi to break her fast by drinking the orange-juice. We then had a meal specially prepared by Alpha Mess comprising the traditional fried *paranthas* and potato curry.

When I came outdoors for a few minutes after our meal, I was overwhelmed by the sight of the clear blue sky filled with a million stars. It gave me the feeling of togetherness with my Creator. It was almost like a unique spiritual experience—one I will cherish forever.

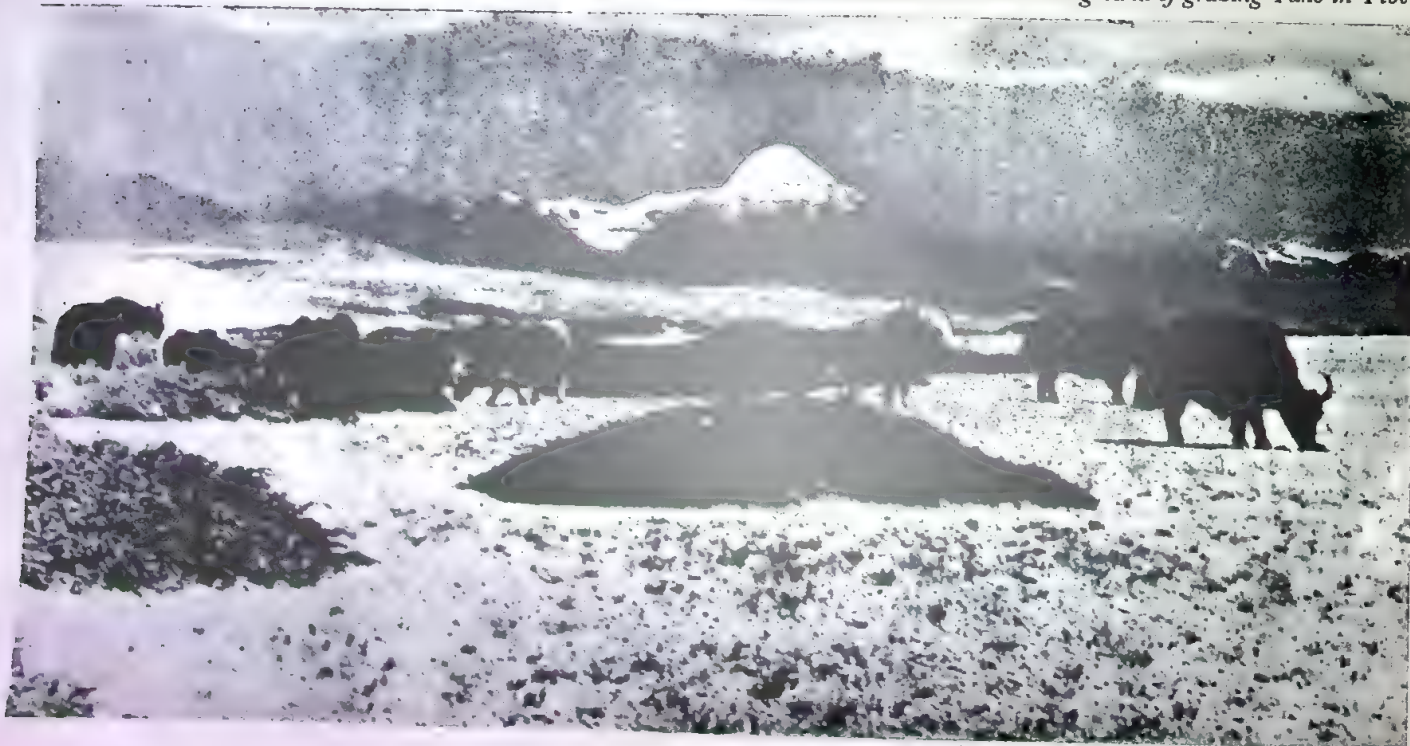
Our sojourn in Ladakh had come to an end. It was time to bid farewell to this land of scenic drama and serene beauty—a land made to be loved for its savage wilderness and for its contrasts that rank it among the most exciting places in the world.

As we drove to the airport the next morning, we could not but be impressed by the clear and bright morning. The snow-clad mountains sparkled in the blue mist. Rows of poplars and willows in their magnificent red and gold colours stood out against the deep blue sky. Minutes after being airborne, I could look beyond the northern horizon across the Karakoram pass, at the throbbing heart of Asia, the meeting ground of ancient cultures and civilizations which had yielded a unique and incomparable blend.

Down below, the city of Leh lay engulfed in the opal morning mist. We caught a last glimpse of the place, the bazar, the Zorawar Fort, the FRL, the Indus—all the familiar landmarks of an ancient city that echoes with the history of forgotten men, travellers and explorers. Here history comes out of a long silence from a remote and wildly enchanting region of the world—a history good and strong once you have grasped its gloss and glitter.

We were sad to leave this strange and mysterious land. Like the old travellers, we promised to come again to enjoy its rugged beauty and to probe deeper into its unknown aspects. But right now, it was time to say "*Jule.*"

Mount Kailash seen in the background of grazing Yaks in Tibet





Author and his wife with His Holiness the Dalai Lama



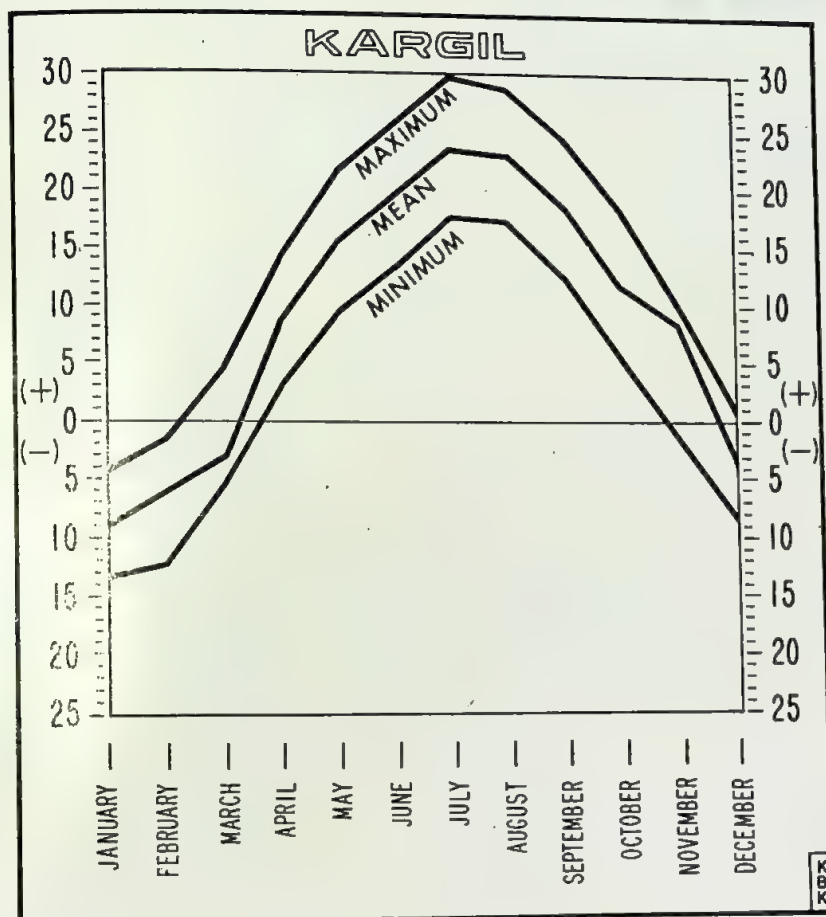
Eric E. Shipton.

MONTHLY DISTRIBUTION OF TEMPERATURE (°C)

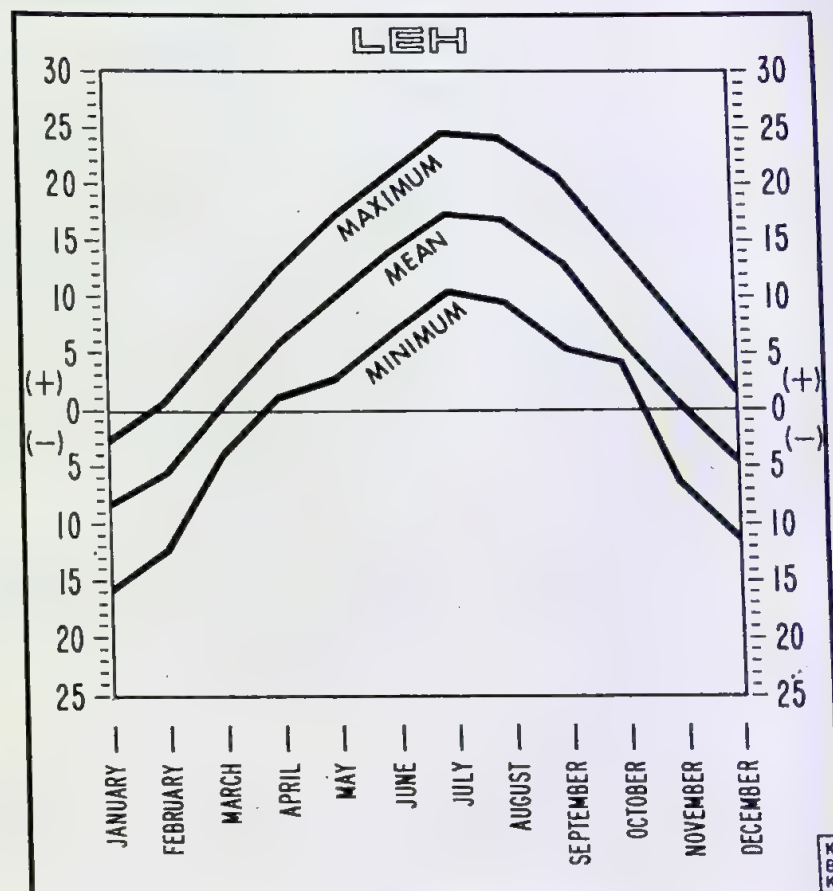
	DRAS.			LEH			KARGIL		
Months	May	Min.	Mean	May	Min	Mean	May	Min	Mean
January	-9.0	-22.0	-15.6	-2.8	-14.0	-8.4	-4.2	-13.3	-8.7
February	-6.7	-21.4	-14.05	0.8	-11.8	-5.5	-1.6	-12.1	-6
March	-2.0	-15.0	-8.5	6.4	-6.3	.05	4.7	-5.3	-3
April	5.4	-5.4	.1	12.4	-1.2	5.7	14.0	3.4	8.7
May	15.1	1.5	8.3	17.1	2.8	9.9	21.6	9.4	15.5
June	20.5	5.6	13.5	21.1	6.7	13.9	25.7	13.4	19.5
July	23.7	10.6	17.1	24.7	10.2	17.4	29.7	17.7	23.7
August	23.6	10.5	17.05	24.2	9.6	16.9	28.9	17.2	23.05
September	19.6	5.9	12.7	20.9	5.4	13.1	24.9	12.5	18.7
October	12.8	-1.1	5.8	14.2	-0.9	6.6	18.5	5.4	11.9
November	4.3	-8.6	-2.1	7.8	-6.6	0.6	10.4	-1.3	8.5
December	-4.0	-16.9	-10.4	1.6	-11.1	-4.6	1.2	-7.9	-3.3

Source: Climatological tables of Observatories in India (1931-1960)

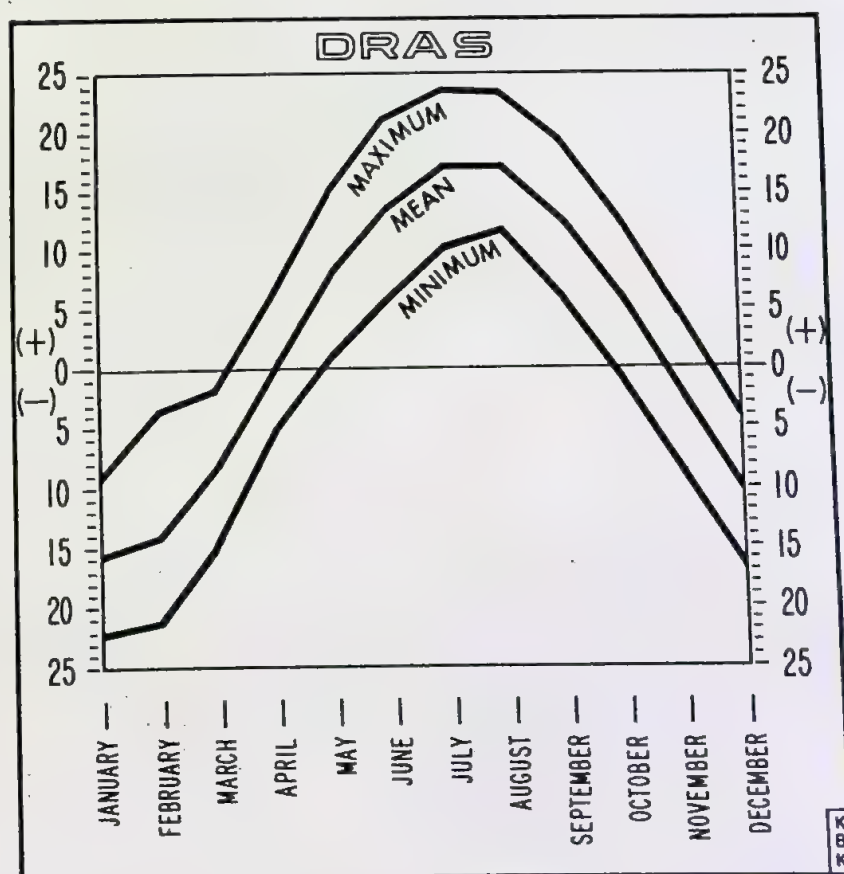
DISTRIBUTION OF TEMPERATURE (C°)



SOURCE: CLIMATOLOGICAL TABLES OF OBSERVATORIES IN INDIA (1931-1977)



SOURCE: CLIMATOLOGICAL TABLES OF OBSERVATORIES IN INDIA (1931-1977)



SOURCE: CLIMATOLOGICAL TABLES OF OBSERVATORIES IN INDIA (1931-1977)

GLOSSARY

NAMES OF PLACES IN LADAKH

ACHINATANG (Tib: *A-ci-na-thang*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on the northern bank of the Indus. Mentioned in an inscription commemorating the construction of road from Achinatang to Hanu in the reign of King Nyi-ma-rnam-rgyal (c. 1680-1720).

ALCHI (Tib: *A-lci, Al-lci*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on the southern bank of the Indus, close to a bridge guarded by an ancient fort, now in ruins. Site of the famous, ancient monastery rNam-par-s nang-mdzad attributed to Rin-chen-brang-po (c. 958-1055) and erected by King Byang-chub-sems-dpa (c. 1020-50). Both are pictured in the frescoes. The monastery consists of six temples of which the gSum-tshag is built in three tiers, patterned on ancient Buddhist temples of Kashmir. Inscriptions mention Mar-pa, Al-ci-pa and 'Brom-ston as contemporaries. The central temple was restored by King bKra-shis-rnam-rgyal (c. 1500-32).

ANLE (Tib: *Wam-le*)

A district with a village of the same name situated between the Rupshu district and the border of Tibet. The village and the monastery lie on a southern tributary of the Indus. This district receives first mention as part of the kingdom of Lha-chen dPal-gvi mgon (c. 930-60). The magnificent 'Brug-pa monastery was erected by king, Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal (c. 1590-1640) who died here on his return from his campaign against gTsang-pa in Central Tibet. During the Dogra wars it was plundered by Zorawar's troops in 1841.

ATING (Tib: *'A-ting*)

Village in Zangskar on the southern bank of the Spontse river where the route to Kishtwar over the Umasi La starts. Here are two ancient rock sculptures which may date back to the eighth or ninth century. The Paldar forces raided Ating in 1820 and destroyed all villages up to Spadum.

BASGO (Tib: *Bab-sgo, Ba-mgo*)

Small town separating Upper and Lower Ladakh, north of the Indus on the Kashmir-Leh road. For parts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it was the capital of Ladakh. North of the Nyemo road and the ruins of an ancient temple and some *chortens* probably from the eleventh century. The se-ljang palace, now in ruins, and *gompa* were built by King Tshe'dbang-rnam-rgyal (c. 1545-75). King Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal (c. 1590-1640) erected a Maitreya statue in gilded copper 1½ storeys high. In the reign of King bDe-legs-rnam-rgyal (c. 1675-1705) Basgo withstood the siege of a large Tibetan-Mongol force for three years, until it was relieved by a large Moghul army from Kashmir sent at the request of bDe-legs which defeated the invaders in the battle of Basgo 1683.

CHA (Tib: *Bya, bCha-ba*)

Village in Zangskar in the Kargyag valley. Above the village are the ruins of an ancient monastery and below them those of a castle. A rock inscription mentions King sKyid-Ide-nyi-ma-mgon (c. 900-930). A ruler of Cha (Bya) is mentioned at the time of the invasion of Mirza Haidar 1532-33 whose Turki troops also overran Zangskar.

CHANG-LA (Tib: *Byang-la*)

The pass on the route from Leh to Khotan and Yarkand through the Shayog valley and from Leh to Ruthog in Tibet. This route was taken by the combined forces of Dogras and Ladakhis under the command of Wazir Zorawar in 1841.

CHANGTHANG (Tib: *Jang-thang*)

Cave dwellings of some nomads situated in the Chumruti district of Tibet. It was formerly more densely populated. The Dril-chung temple, now in ruins, is recorded in the biography of Rin-chen-bzang-po (c. 958-1055) as having been built by him. The ruins of a great castle mKhar-pro-che are nearby.

CHEMRE (Tib: *lCe-bde, lCem-'bre*)

Village and monastery in Upper Ladakh on a small northern tributary of the Indus. The monastery

Theg-mchog-gling was built by King Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal (c.1590-1640) for the 'Brug-pa order under sTag-tshang-ras-chen and completed under his successor bDe-Idan rnam-rgyal. A silver plaque over the door of the main building gives only a date 1625. In the second Dogra war of 1841-42 Dewan Hari Chand defeated here a Tibetan force of hundred mounted and 500 foot soldiers.

CHIGTAN (Tib: *Cig-Idan, Cig-gtan*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on a small, southern tributary of the Indus, formerly the capital of the Purig sultans. Above the present village are the ruins of the old castle and town, erected probably long before the Chigtan chiefs became Mohamedans around 1550. It was annexed by Ladakh in 1664. An ancient temple is attributed to the bKa'-gdams-pa period (early eleventh century). Statues and frescoes were destroyed, but the shrine is still frequented by the Buddhists from Da and Hanu across the Indus.

CHORBAD (Tib: *Chor-'bad, Chos-'bad*)

Balti village and principality on the Shayog river adjoining Lower Ladakh and separated from it by the Chorbad pass. It was conquered in 1662 or 1674 by the Ladakhi forces under Shakya-rgya-mtsho in the reign of bDe-Idan-rnam-rgyal (c.1640-75) when also the capital Khapalu was taken.

CHUSHOD (Tib: *Chu-shod*)

Large village in Upper Ladakh on the southern bank of the Indus. It is predominantly a Mohamedan settlement and may have been started at the end of the sixteenth century, when due to the Balti wars Ladakh had to accept the suzerainty of the Mohamedan Baltis. It probably grew to its present size during the seventeenth century when political developments favoured such an expansion.

CHUSHUL (Tib: *Chushul*)

Village in Upper Ladakh south of the Pangkong lake. In 1842 in the course of the second Dogra war Dewan Hari Chand pursuing the retreating Tibetan forces gained here, according to one account, a decisive victory.

DA (Tib: *mDa*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on the north of the Indus, inhabited by Dards. In the fifteenth century the Khri Sultans of dKhar-rtse assisted Kashmir in annexing this 'Brog-pa i.e. Dard district of Da, till then a part of Nga-ris-skor-gsum.

DARU (Tib: *Ta-ru*).

Village in Upper Ladakh north of the Kashmir-Leh road between Phyang and Nyemo. A rock inscription here refers to Lha-chen-bha-gan and his minister Phyag-rdor-jo. Bha-gan deposed and imprisoned the last king of the first dynasty and founded the second dynasty. He reigned from c.1470-1500.

DEMCHOG (Tib: *bDe-mchog-dkar-po*)

A fortified place and ancient monastery at the Lha-ri brook, on the west bank of the Indus, after the Leh-Lhasa trade route had passed into Tibetan territory. It is mentioned as marking the border, when Ladakh was assigned to Lha-chen-dpal-gyi-mgon (c. 930-960) and again in the Treaty of Tingmogang in 1683.

DESKYID (Tib: *bDe-skyid*)

A village in Nubra, south of the confluence of the Nubra and Shayog rivers with a picturesquely situated monastery. Its name occurs in a hymn addressed to King Nyi-ma-rnam rgyal (c.1705-34).

DOMKHAR (Tib: *mDo-khar, mDo-mkhar*)

Village in Lower Ladakh north of the Indus one stage from Khalaste on the road to Baltistan. A rock inscription refers to King rNam-rgyal-mgon-po (c. 1575-80).

DORKUG (Tib: *rDokhug, 'Dor-khug*)

Village in Upper Ladakh west of the Pangkong lake on a southern tributary of the Shayog river. During the second Dogra war in 1842 Dewan Hari Chand defeated here a Ladakhi-Tibetan force retreating to Nubra.

DRANGTSE (Tib: *Brang-rtse*)

Small village and gumpa in Upper Ladakh west of the Pangkong lake on a southern tributary of the Shayog

river. For centuries it was an important staging place for caravans, as here the route from Turkistan down the Shayog valley branched off either west to Leh or east to Ruthog and Garthog. It abounds with rock inscriptions among them the *Ye dharma* formula in Gupta script of the ninth century. Of particular interest is also a Nestorian Christian inscription in Soghdian script captioned with a Greek cross stating that "Charansar from Samarkand journeying 215 stages reached Tibet." Its age is undetermined as it bears no date but it may be of the ninth or tenth century. It is the southern-most point at which a Soghdian inscription has been found.

DRANGTSE (Tib: *Grang-rtse*)

Village in Zangskar situated in the Kargyag valley on the route to the Shingkun pass. Above the village are an ancient monastery and the ruins of a whole town. The place was seized by the Tibetans in the tenth century and in retaliation destroyed by the Kashmiris.

GYA (Tib: *rGya*)

Village in Upper Ladakh on the Gya river, a southern tributary of the Indus, and on the road to Rupshu. Extensive ruins of an ancient castle and town with several watch towers point to their Mon or Dard origin, before these were driven out under Lha-chen dPal-gyi-mgon (c. 930–60). There are also ruins of an ancient monastery, name and origin unknown, and several *chortens*. One of these known as the Lha-bab-mchod-rten yielded some clay tablets (*tsha-tsha*) with inscriptions of the eighth or ninth century. Some distance below Gya are a high, pre-Buddhist lhatho and a number of Mon graves.

HANU (Tib: *Ha-nu*)

A Dard village in Lower Ladakh on a northern tributary of the Indus on the road to Baltistan over the Chorbit pass. An inscription mentions the construction of the road from Achinatang to Hanu in the reign of Nyi-ma-rnam-rgyal (c. 1680–1720).

HEMIS (Tib: *He-mi-He-mis*)

A famous monastery in Upper Ladakh, situated in a side valley south of the Indus and named Byang-chub-bsam-gling. It was built by King Seng-ge-rnam rgyal (c. 1590–1640) for sTag-tshang-ras-chen of the 'Brug-pa order from Bhutan. Founded in 1602 the building was completed in 1642. The magnificent frescoes show Kashmiri and Khotani influence. Some of the images are of the tenth and eleventh century and may have been brought from the old *gompa* in Meru called "The Mother of Hemis."

HENASKU (Tib: *He-nas-ku, He-nas-sku*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on the Kharbu river, a southern tributary of the Indus, close to the Kashmir-Leh road. The castle was the seat of a line of Purig chiefs of royal descent who were related to the kings of Ladakh. This principality was annexed under bDe-Idan-rnam-rgyal (c. 1640–75).

HUNDAR (Tib: *sNgon-dar*)

Village in Nubra district on a southern tributary of the Shayog close to the confluence of the Nubra and Shayog rivers. Ruins of a fort or castle are probably the place where a Turki army under Mirza Haidar invading Nubra defeated a Ladakhi force under Bang-khapa in 1532. A votive tablet refers to King Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal (c. 1590–1640).

ICHAR (Tib: *Gyi-char*)

Village in Zangskar situated in the Kargyag valley. The village is built, ancient fashion, on a steep rock. Above it lie a deserted monastery and the ruins of a large, square tower. Gyi-char is mentioned in a document of a grant of land made to Karsha *gompa*.

IGU (Tib: *dByi-gu*)

Village in Upper Ladakh in a small side valley north of the Indus. The castle gSer-khri-makhr was the seat of the famed Bang-kha-pa family of ministers and generals. There are many ancient ruins, the carving of a huge Bodhisattva statue and on some of the walls traces of frescoes. The old castle was destroyed by the invading Tibetan-Mongol forces in 1680.

JAMLING (Tib: *Byams-gling*)

Village and monastery in Zangskar situated on a northern tributary of the Tserab river. The name of the

gompa is gNya-nam-gu-ru possibly indicating an ancient origin but no details are available. A second monastery also called gNya-nam-gu-ru exists close to Spadum.

KANJI (Tib: *Kan-ji*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on the Kharbu river, a southern tributary of the Indus. The path branching off from the Kashmir-Leh road leads through a formidable gorge. Its ancient temple Lha-bcu-rtse Lha-khang was built according to an inscription in Wanla in the bKa'-gdams-pa time, i.e. in the days of 'Brom-ston their founder, in the eleventh century.

KARGYAG (Tib: *dKar-rgyags*)

Village and river of the same name in Zangskar. Above the village are the ruins of an ancient castle. This valley connects Zangskar with Lahaul via the Shing-kun pass.

KARSHA (Tib: *dKar-sha*)

Important monastery in Zangskar with a village attached to it and its principal dGe-lugs-pa institution. It is situated north of the confluence of the Spontse and Tserab rivers.

KHALATSE (Tib: *Kha-la-rtse*)

Village in Lower Ladakh where since ancient days a bridge over the Indus existed. Many rock inscriptions were found below the bridge, one in Brahmi script from approximately 200 BC., others in Karoshti from the sixth to eighth century. Several old *chortens* near the village had votive inscriptions in early Gupta script from the fifth century. Ruins of an ancient Dard fort were discovered between the river and the present road guarding a bridge site. Above the village are the ruins of Brag-nag castle built by King-Lha-chen-nag-lug (c.1110-14). A distance upstream are the ruins of three old customs houses of sBa-lu-mkhar. The present fort guarding the bridge was built after the Dogra wars (1833-42). The Moravian Mission station was started here in 1899.

KHARBU (Tib: *mKhar-bu*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on the Kharbu river, a southern tributary of the Indus on the road from Kashmir to Leh. On a rocky spur above the village are the extensive ruins of a castle and town. In the reign of Seng-ge'rnam-rgyal (c. 1590-1640), he fought here successfully against a large Moghul force sent from Kashmir by Shahjahan which withdrew. An half-obliterated inscription below the old town refers to him. Kharbu was captured by the Ladakhi forces in the reign of bDe-Idan-rnam-rgyal (c. 1640-75) probably in 1622.

KHARDONG (Tib: *mKhar-rdzong*)

Village in Nubra on a southern tributary of the Shayog river and on the road to Leh from the Nubra valley over the Khardong pass, named after this village.

KHARNAG (Tib: *mKhar-nag*)

District and river of the same name in northern Zangskar bordering on Ladakh. The Kharnag river is a southern tributary of Zangskar-river and joins it about fifteen miles above its junction with the Indus. King Seng-ge'rnam-rgyal of Ladakh (c. 1590-1640) presented this whole valley as a land grant for the upkeep of the monasteries under Hemis *gompa*.

KORZOG (Tib: *bKor-rdzod*)

Camping place of nomads and a monastery in Rupshu at the west shore of the Tsomoriri lake. The present building was erected after the Dogra wars around 1850 replacing an older temple of very ancient origin of the Mon era. of which however no trace remains. The sandal-wood statue of Padmasambhava was brought from Lower Ladakh.

LAMAYURU (Tib: *gYung-drung*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on a small, southern tributary of the Indus and on the Kashmir-Leh road. It has two monasteries; the famous 'Bri-gung-pa monastery founded by Naropa c. 990 AD., after "he had by magic cleared the valley of a lake." Its oldest part, the Seng-ge-sgang temple, resembles the one at Tabo, also of that period. There are statues of Naropa and the nine bKa'-brgyud-pa fathers. Below the monastery is the gYung drung (Swastika) temple, the foremost Bon-po place of worship in Ladakh. Its frescoes are damaged, the statues

show Buddhist influence.

LIGTSE (Tib: *Lig-rtse*)

Village in Upper Ladakh on the north bank of the Indus, fifteen miles from lgu on the Leh-Lhasa route. The bridge over the Indus was destroyed by the fleeing Tibetan army in 1842 to hinder the pursuit by the Dogra forces under Dewan Hari Chand.

LIKYIR (Tib: *Li-kyir-Klu-'khyil*)

Village in Lower Ladakh in a side valley, north of the Indus on the old trade route from Basgo to Khalatse bridge. The *gompa* Klu-khyil, also spelled Klu-dkyil was founded in the reign of Lha chen-rgyal-po (c. 1050–80). According to an inscription it became a dGe-lugs-pa institution under Lha-dbang-chos rje in the fifteenth century.

LINGSHED (Tib: *Ling-snyed*)

Village and monastery on the border between Lower Ladakh and Zangskar, west of the Zangskar river. King bKra-shis-rnam-rgyal (c.1500–35) having blinded and deposed his elder brother Lha-dbang-rnam-rgyal and usurped the title, banished him and his family to this place.

LINGTI (Tib: *Ling-ti*)

Camping ground in Rupshu which formed the border between Ladakh and Lahaul, situated north of the Baralacha pass on the route to Rupshu and Leh. Under Ladakhi rule Lahaul had annually to deliver here a tribute of hundred loads of iron from Kulu and an equal amount of sulphur from the Phuga mines.

MANGYU (Tib: *Mang-rgyu*)

Village in Lower Ladakh, situated in a side valley, south of the Indus not far from Alchi. It is the site of four ancient temples attributed to Rin-chen-bzang-po (c. 958–1055). The Byams-chen temple has a huge Maitreya statue, and the Thugsrje-chen-mo temple, now partly in ruins, still a beautifully carved door, but the inscriptions are no longer decipherable. The 'Jams-chung temple with its statue of Manjusri and some ancient frescoes is still the best preserved, whilst the rNam-par-sngang-mdzad temple is totally in ruins. The Tretapuri *chorten* (Tirthapuri *stupa*) bespeaks of the existence centuries ago of that heretical (Jaina) sect here. These temples once on a par with those of Alchi are now in a much inferior condition.

MARTSELANG (Tib: *dMar-rtse-lang*)

Village in Upper Ladakh on the southern bank of the Indus. From here to Chushod are found many ancient *chortens* of the Mon type i.e. *chortens* from the time prior to the present Tibetan-Buddhist period. Lying at the lower end of the gTsang-kha, popularly Shang valley where the Hemis monastery is situated, both valley and village were gifted to Hemis by King Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal (c. 1590–1640).

MERU (Tib: *Me-ru*)

Village and monastery in Upper Ladakh situated on the Gya river, a southern tributary of the Indus. Formerly it had a very important and ancient monastery, named probably Sumeru, its founder is unknown. When Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal (c. 1590–1640) built Hemis *gompa*, Meru was made the "Mother of Hemis," its "spirit" and statues were transferred there. It was plundered during the Dogra wars (1834–43). Among the ruins is still a fresco left of Gog-bzang-lha-mo, the mother of Kesar.

MULBE (Tib: *Mul-bhe-Mul-'bye*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on the Kashmir-Leh road and on the Wakha river, a southern tributary of the Indus. Here are two monasteries and an ancient Dard castle. A huge rock sculpture of Maitreya twenty-four feet high dates from about 700 A.D. Close to it in an old temple are eight deities, probably of Bon-po origin. One rock edict by King 'Bum-de (c. 1410–40) forbids all bloody sacrifices, till then apparently customary in local worship, the other refers to the marriage of King 'Jam-dbyange-rnam-rgyal (c. 1580–90) to a Balti princess.

NU (Tib: *sNu*)

Village in Guge north of the Suture on the Hindustan Tibet trade route. Here are the ruins of two ancient forts of unknown origin. Two small temples sGong-khang and dGa-ldan-phun-tshogs, both dGe-lugs-pa, have well preserved, delicate frescoes of the early seventeenth century.

NUBRA (Tib: *Nub-ra*, *IDum-ra*)

The most northernly district of Ladakh on both banks of the Nubra river, large tributary of the Shayog. From Nubra, the road to Turkestan leads over the Saser pass and at Murgo joins the Shayog valley route. Nubra was devastated by a Turki invasion under Mirza Haidar in 1532.

NYEMO (Tib: *Nye-mo*)

Village in Upper Ladakh, north of the Indus on the Kashmir-Leh road. At the nunnery of Nyemo is an ancient rock sculpture of its first abbes Jo-mo-rdo-rje. On the cliffs above the Indus are the ruins of the Chung-mkhar castle.

NYOMA (Tib: *Nyo-ma*)

Village in Upper Ladakh on the north bank of the Indus on the Leh-Lhasa route. Here are many ancient *chortens* one even built in three tiers. This, as well as the location of the ruins of a castle and town on a high, rocky spur indicate that they were built by Mons prior to the tenth century. The 'Brug-pa monastery was founded or renovated in the reign of Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal.

NYURLA (Tib: *sNyur-la*, *sNyung-la*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on the north bank of the Indus on the Kashmir-Leh road. Here the former road to Tingmogang, Likyir and Basgo branched off and led along the course of a northern tributary of the Indus.

PANGKONG (Tib: *Pang-kong*, *sPang-skong*)

Large lake in Upper Ladakh with brackish water. At its eastern end runs the Tibetan border.

PHIYANG (Tib: *Phyi-dbang*)

Large village in Upper Ladakh eight miles west of Leh on a northern tributary of the Indus. The famous 'Bri-gung-pa monastery sGang-sngon-bkra-shis-chos-rdzong, popularly sGang-sngon dgon-pa, was built by King bKra-shis-rnam-rgyal (c. 1500-35) for Cho-srji-ldan-ma. The monastery has a bronze Buddha of the ninth or tenth century and is famed for its collection of armour. At the place where the monastery is first seen, the Thar-chen (Great Flag) was erected by bKra-shis-rnam-rgyal and any culprit fleeing there and reaching this spot went scot-free.

RANGDUM (Tib: *Rang-'dum*)

A monastery of the dGe-lugs-pa order situated close to the source of the Suru river below the Spontse pass which connects Tangskar with Purig. During the Dogra wars in 1835 Wazir Zorawar on his way back to Jammu halted here and returned to Ladakh to quell a revolt.

RIZONG (Tib: *Ri-rdzong*)

dGe-lugs-pa monastery in Upper Ladakh in a side valley three miles north of the Kashmir-Leh road between Nyurla and Saspola. The present structure is of fairly recent origin and is said to have been begun by a rich merchant from Saspola. The line of the head-lamas of this *gompa* Tshul-khrims-nyi-ma perpetuates as spiritual descendants the ancient Tshul-khrims-nyi-ma mentioned in a inscription of the cave monastery of Saspola.

RUPSHU (Tib: *Ru-bcu*, *Ru-shod*, *Rub-sho*)

District in Upper Ladakh around the Tsomoriri lake south of the Indus. The inhabitants are nomads, the altitude being too high for agriculture. The name Ru-shod (Abundance of cattle) indicates their sole livelihood. Ruins found in many places of this district point to Mon settlements before the Tibetans moved in during the tenth century.

RUTHOG (Tib: *Ru-thog*, *Ru-thogs*)

District and town in Tibet bordering on Ladakh, east of the Pangkong lake. Ruthog, Hanle and Ladakh formed the kingdom of Lha-chen-dpal-gyi-mgon (c. 930-60). Later Ruthog became a province of the kingdom of Guge, and King Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal (c.1590-1640) in the course of his war with Guge took Ruthog and deposed its chief. In the Treaty of Tingmogang in 1683 it was assigned to Tibet.

SABU (Tib: *Sa-bu*)

Village in Upper Ladakh a few miles east of Leh on a small northern tributary of the Indus. Said to have

been founded by a group of Me-nyag, otherwise only found in Eastern Tibet. The castle sPyang-mkhar and the town Seng-ge-sgang were built in the reign of Lha-chen-shes-rab (c. 1350-80). Both are now only ruins. His successor Khri-gtsug-lde (c.1380-1410) erected several rows of *chortens*, of which a few remain.

SAKTI (Tib: *Shakti*)

Village in Upper Ladakh in the Chemre valley with the ruins of three ancient castles and many houses. These forts guarded the approach to the Byang-La (Chang pass). They were captured and destroyed by the Mongol-Tibetan army under Tshe-dbang which invaded Ladakh in 1680 driving the Ladakhi forces back to Basgo.

SANI (Tib: *Sa-ni*)

Small village in Zangskar, south of the Spontse river, a few miles from its junction with the Tserab. It is the seat of the Ka-ni-ka *gompa*, one of the three most ancient monasteries of Zangskar, probably eighth or ninth century, predating the arrival of Tibetans. Ka-ni-ka is named after the great Kushana King Kanishka 120-160 AD. of North India and Kashmir.

SASPOLA (Tib: *Sa-spo-la*)

Large village in Lower Ladakh, north of the Indus and on the Kashmir-Leh road. An ancient cave temple has some well-preserved frescoes. The inscription refers to Tshul-khrims-nyi-ma, probably the line of incarnations perpetuated in the head-lamas of Rizong *gompa*. Two ancient *chortens* are attributed to Rin-chen-bzang-po (c. 958-1055). On the remains of the larger one the Byams-pa *gompa* was built recently. An inscription refers to the construction of a bridge in the reign of Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal.

SHARGOLA (Tib: *Shar-'go-lha, Shar-sgo-la*)

Village in lower Ladakh on the Wakha river, a southern tributary of the Indus and on the Kashmir-Leh road. The meaning of Shar-'go-lha is "Lord of the Morning Star." An ancient song ascribes the first building of a monastery here to Agu Drum-ba of the Kesar Saga, the "Messenger of the Rising Sun," i.e. the morning star. The *gompa*, now dGe-lugs-pa, is an ancient cave monastery. Its former name was Ma-khang (house of the mother) and may refer to dPal-ldan-lha-mo (Sri Devi). The frescoes are recent renovations.

SHAYOG (Tib: *Sha-gyog*)

The largest northern tributary of the Indus before the two rivers meet at Skardu in Baltistan. It is the source of the periodical inundations by the Indus due to a dam formed by occasionally large sections of a glacier sliding over a cliff and blocking a valley so that a large lake forms near the Dapsang plateau. The name is formed by the two syllables *shag*—gravel and *gyog*—to spread and means "Gravel Spreader" alluding to the vast quantities of gravel deposited by its floods.

SHEH (Tib: *Shel*)

Large village in Upper Ladakh on the north bank of the Indus and about ten miles east of Leh. Sheh was the ancient capital of Ladakh from the pre-Tibetan era up to the fifteenth century when Leh began to be preferred. The large rock sculpture of Maitreya dates from the reign of sKyid-lde-nyi-ma-mgon (Vc. 900-30). The ruins of the old castle and town may be somewhat later, they overlook the village and the palace of the early kings of Ladakh. During the Turki invasion Mirza Haidar occupied Sheh from 1534-36. King bDe-ldan-rnam-rgyal (c. 1640-75) erected at the palace temple a Shakya Thub-pa statue of gilded copper three storeys high, and a *chorten* in memory of his father Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal, five storeys high.

SKYURBUCAN (Tib: *Skyur-bu-can*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on the north bank of the Indus. Its name occurs in two songs addressed by this village to King Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal (c.1590-1640) and in another addressed to King Nyi-ma-rnam-rgyal (c.1705-34).

SPADUM (Tib: *dPa-gtum, dPal-'dum*)

The capital of Zangskar since ancient times, Spadum is situated a few miles from the junction of the Spontse and Tserab rivers. When under King Nyi-ma-mgon (c.900-30) the Tibetans invaded Zangskar and drove out the Dard and Kashmir population they occupied the castle brGya-byin-pho-lad (Indra's mansion). It fell into the

hands of Mirza Haidar and his Turki troops in 1532-33. It was finally destroyed by a combined Kulu Kunavari force nearly in the nineteenth century. Near Spadum is also the gNya-nam-gu-ru *gompa* of Pi-pi-ting, one of the three earliest monasteries of Zangskar, dating back to the eighth or ninth century.

SPITHUG (Tib: *dPe-thub*)

Village in Upper Ladakh on the northern bank of the Indus five miles south of Leh. It has a famous monastery of the dGe-lugs-pa order built by King Grags-'bumlde (c.1410-40) to whom the reformer Tsonghapa had sent two emissaries. The sKushog (sKu-gzhog) residing at this *gompa* is the incarnation of Bakula, who is the religious authority over all dGe-lugs-pa monasteries in Ladakh.

STAGLUNG (Tib: *sTag-lung*)

Name of the monastery of Ngod in Rupshu in a small side valley south of the Indus approximately eight miles from Nyoma. The ruins of this monastery apparently once a large convent, cover a large rocky spur. It was built by Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal the step-brother of King-Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal and must have belonged to the Brug-pa order.

STAGNA (Tib: *sTag-sna*)

Monastery in Upper Ladakh, not far from Hemis, built on a rocky spur between two arms of the Indus. Built by Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal the step-brother of King Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal, it belongs to the 'Brug-pa order. King Seng-ge's second son Indra-bhothi-rnam-rgyal was ordained here who, after becoming the head of the Hemis and Chemre *gompas*, was made the ruler of Guge, after its annexation by Ladakh.

STAGTSE (Tib: *sTag-rtse*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on the Kharbu river, a southern tributary of the Indus, close to the Kashmir Leh-road. Its castle, the seat of the chiefs of Chigtan, was captured by King bDe-ldan-rgyal (c.1640-75) after the siege of Kharbu. Not far from it are the ruins of a large temple Mun-dig-lha-khang and two rows of *chortens*, all of undetermined age.

STOG (Tib: *sTok, Tog*)

Fairly large village in Upper Ladakh, five miles south of the Indus, opposite to Leh. It is the residence of the present royal family of Ladakh. For centuries it has been the seat of a minister (bKa'-blon). King Tshe-dpal-don-grub (c.1790-1841) rebuilt the palace at Stog and erected there a statue of Sita-Tara of nine maunds of silver. After an unsuccessful rebellion against the Dogra regime in 1834 Wazir Zorawar banished the king to Stog.

STONGDE (Tib: *sTong-sde*)

Village in Zangskar west of the confluence of the Spontse and Tserab rivers. It has a large castle and was during the seventeenth century, the capital of Zangskar. It was captured by the Ladakhi forces in the reign of bDe-Idan-rnam-rgyal (c. 1640-75), who then installed his brother bDe-mchog as regent.

TEBA (Tib: *gTe-ya, lTe-ba*)

Village in Lower Ladakh, on a northern tributary of the Indus, close to the former road from Basgo to Khalatse. Together with Tingmogang these two villages form the most populated area in Lower Ladakh. King Gragspa-'bum (c.1410-40) founder of the second Ladakh dynasty resided here before he made Tingmogang his capital.

TINGMOGANG (Tib: *gTing-sgang, Ting-mo-sgang*)

Large village in Lower Ladakh and former second capital of the country, situated on a northern tributary of the Indus and on the former highway from Basgo to Khalatse. Under King Grags-pa-'bum (c.1410-40), the founder of the second Dynasty, Tingmogang became the capital where the rulers of Lower Ladakh resided. When in the reign of bDe-legs-rnam-rgyal (c. 1675-1705) a Mongol-Tibetan army under Tshe-dbang overran all Upper Ladakh and besieged Basgo for three years, he resided here and requested help from the Moghuls in Kashmir. After Tshe-dbang had been defeated and the siege of Basgo lifted, the Treaty of Tingmogang was negotiated here in 1683 which regulated Ladakh's borders and relations with its neighbours. During the first Dogra war (1833-34) Zorawar destroyed the treasury built by Nyi-ma-rnam-rgyal (c. 1705-34).

TRIKTSE OR THRIKTSE (Tib: *Khri-rtse, Khrig-rtse*)

Village in Upper Ladakh, north of the Indus and south-east of Sheh. It has a famous dG-lugs-pa monastery, its founder is unknown. It may have been built in the reign of Gargs-'bum-lde (c.1410-40) who favoured the reform under Tsongkhapa. The frescoes and paintings in the main shrine and in the nunnery chapel are by Ladakhi artists. So is a complete set of pictures of the eighty-four Mahasiddhas in the courtyard which were painted in the reign of Tshe-dbang-rnam-rgyal (1535-75).

TSAZAR (Tib: *Tsha-zar*)

Village in Zangskar, east of the Zangskar river between Stongde and Zangla. It has an important Bri-gung-pa monastery which was erected by rGyal-bsam-rin-chen-dpal-lde (c. 1500-30) who made at the same time a grant of three villages for its maintenance.

TSOMORIRI (Tib: *mTsho-mo-rin*)

The largest lake in the Rupshu district, length fifteen miles, width three to five miles and depth 248 feet. The water is brackish. On its western shore stands Korzod monastery. The present building was erected around 1850, but the origin of the shrine goes back to Mon and Dard times possibly before the ninth century.

WANLA (Tib: *Wan-la*)

Village in Lower Ladakh on a southern tributary of the Indus which joins it a mile west of Khalatse bridge. The castle at Wanla was built in the reign of Lha-chen-nag-lug (c. 1110-40). The famous bCu-gcig-zhal temple at Wanla is said to have an inscription that it was built in the bKa'-gdams-pa time *i.e.* in the time of 'Brom-ston, their founder, in the eleventh century, and also the names of three other temples built in Lower Ladakh during that period.

ZANGLA (Tib: *bZang-la*)

Village in Zangskar, east of the Zangskar river. It has a large castle, the seat of the Zangla chiefs, a branch line of the kings of Zangskar. This line came into being when King Seng-ge-lde (c.1440-70) divided the country between his two sons, the younger receiving Zangla and the country bordering on Ladakh as his domain. Not far from Zangla is the monastery rDzong-khul where Csoma de Koros began his Tibetan studies in 1820.

GLOSSARY

Atisha: a Teacher of Mahayana Buddhism who lived from 980 A.D. to about 1052 A.D. He mastered the principles of Buddhism.

Avalokiteshvara: one of the greatest Bodhisattvas in the Buddhist pantheon

Bodhicitta: "enlightenment consciousness," a term used in Tantrik Buddhism, often identified with the male semen.

Bodhisattva: a being, in Buddhism, entitled to Nirvana, but remaining in the world, out of total compassion, to aid all suffering creatures towards their own enlightenment.

Bokhari: a heater in which oil is burnt in a closed container.

Bon: an old religion of the Tibetans before they became Buddhists. Bon-po are the followers of Bon religion which has survived till today in some regions of Tibet. It is a kind of animistic religion involving the invocation of supernatural spirits. According to Bon religion the world is divided into three parts—earth, air and paradise; each one of which is supposed to be inhabited by spirits responsible for every kind of human calamity and misery. Animal and even human sacrifice was a characteristic feature of ancient Bon Religion.

Buddha: originally a historical teacher (C 500 bc) who founded Buddhism, later recognised as only one of many figures embodying the transcendent principle of enlightenment.

Cakra: one of the series of centres in the meditative subtle body, conceived as discs or lotuses.

Chang: local barley beer.

Choga: long flowing gown.

Chog-tse: low tea table.

Chorten (Stupa): a building where sacred relics are enshrined.

Dharma: ordinarily religion; in the context of Buddhism the law propagated by Lord Buddha.

Dzo: a cross between a cow and a yak.

Ge-lug-pa: yellow hat sect.

Gompa: monastery.
Gothuk: traditional Ladakhi dinner.
Guru: teacher or preceptor.
Gurudwara: a sikh temple
Gyalmo: queen
Gyalpo: king
Jagir: estate
Kalacakra: "Wheel of Time," a special Tantrik Buddhist system of mandalas and meditations.
Kantop: a hat.
Karma: the deeds performed by each individual during his successive incarnations, which, according to their positive or negative value, lead him up or down the scale of being towards or away from final release and bliss.
Kashag: Council.
Ke-gyu-pa: red hat sect.
Khatak: white scarf.
Khudai: thanksgiving ceremony to the Almighty for a safe journey.
Kushok: Head Lama.
Lama (bla-ma): in classical Tibetan language the word is bla-ma which is equivalent to "the venerable master." The Sanskrit equivalent for it is "Guru."
Lamaism: it is a common but not very appropriate name given to Tibetan or Tantrik Buddhism. The word is coined from "Lama" which signifies a learned old monk.
Lamasery: monastery of Buddhist monks.
Losar: new year.
Mahakala: "Great time," the form of the High God Siva in which his nature as Time is revealed.
Mandala: a circular form of diagram used for concentrating and focusing cosmic and psychic energy.
Mani: "jewel," a substitute term for vajra which indicates the highest Tantrik Buddhist insight.
Maniwall: a wall made of stone slabs inscribed with small prayers left behind by pilgrims as thanksgiving.
Mantra: symbolic-evocative sound or word of spiritual power.
Mara: temper.
Momo: a Ladakhi delicacy made of minced meat.
Namda: rug
Nirvana: enlightenment
Padma: Lotus
Pashmina: fine wool.
Perak: cobra type headgear studded with turquoise.
Pothi: religious book
Purana: a class of Sanskrit encyclopaedic collections of myth and legend.
Rebo: black yak-hair tent.
Sadhu: recluse
Sarai: Inn
Sanyas: to renounce the world.
Shap-po: minister.
Sunyata: voidness, or metaphysical emptiness.
Sattu: roasted ground barley.
Sakyamuni: This is a title given to the historical Buddha or Gautama Buddha.
Srub-Lha: harvest festival.
Stupa: a symbolic structure developed in India from a mound near the summit of which the bodily relics of early Buddhist saints were enshrined for public reverence.
Tankha: a religious painting or scroll.
Tantra: a kind of text embodying special Tantrik tradition of teaching, many of the Hindu examples being in the form of a dialogue between the ultimate Divine Couple, Siva and Sakti.
Thakur: a rich land lord
Tsampa: barley flour.
Upanishads: ancient summaries of the nuclear philosophy of Hinduism, regarded in India with profound reverence as sacred scriptures.
Vajra: thunder bolt, an emblem of power in Tantrik Buddhism.

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List of Colour Illustrations.

	Page No.
Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Kashmir with Wa-zir Zo-ra-war Singh.	7
Leh Town at a height of 3,500 metres.	8
Ten million cubic feet of snow is cleared every year from the Leh-Srinagar highway before the tourist season opens.	10
Rock-carving of Maitreya at Mulbek, 10th century A.D.	11
Autumn at its best in village Nimo.	12
The Kargil mosque.	14
Ladakhi muslims from Kargil.	14
Gyalmo—The Queen of Ladakh, Namgya Deskit.	23
Kargil woman.	24
Caravan man and his family.	25
Jule.	26
Festive attire.	26
Spinning and selling vegetables.	27
Irrigation.	28
Vegetable sellers.	29
Polo made a beginning here.	30
Hemis, the most important monastery of Ladakh.	39
Ancient manuscripts in Hemis.	40
Threshing.	41
The learned ones.	41
Monastic dances in progress in the main Hemis courtyard.	42
Lama dancer.	43
Serpentine que at the Kalacakra ceremony in Leh.	44
His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.	45
Mural of Maha Kala.	46
First reproduction of front and back covers of the Giligit manuscript, 5th century A.D.	63
Srid-pe-Khorlo, the wheel of life.	64
First reproduction of a 12th century Tankha.	65
Drogpas, the ancient Aryan tribe.	66
Changpas, high altitude nomads.	68
Sakyamuni Buddha.	70
The hermitage with river Indus.	79
First reproduction of a 12th century Tankha.	80
Large chorten in Hemis studded with precious and semi precious stones.	81
Prayer carvings.	82
Animism.	83
The Mangol looks.	84
A woman from Yarkhand with her Ladakhi friend.	85
A Ladakhi beauty.	86
River Indus.	103
Ganglas—the highest village in Leh valley.	104
Nun (ht. 7,135m).	106
The Suru valley and the climbers.	107
Kyangs, the wild asses at a height of 4,500 metres.	108
Field Research laboratory, Leh.	110
Village Hunder, Nubra.	127
The Nubra valley against the Karakoram Range.	128
Old man from village Deskit, Nubra.	130
Smile from Panamik, the last village on the Treaty Road, Nubra Valley.	131
Harvest time in Nubra valley.	132

Double hump camels on the old Treaty Road to Koshgar.	134
A house in Deskit with hay stacked on the roof to provide insulation.	147
The splendour of Nubra Valley.	148
River Shyok.	150
River Nubra.	151
Pangong Lake, 136 kilometres long at a height of 4,550 metres, with the Tibetan border running along its eastern end.	152
The children of Ladakh.	154

INDEX

A

Affendi, Mohamamed Isa, 123
Afrasiab, 126
Aksai Chin, 144
Alchi, 49
Alexander, 140
Ali, Mohomed, 52
Alpha Mess, 159, 166
Alps, 138
Angmu, Jigme, 38
Antiquities of Indian Tibet, 161
Anuttarayoga Tantra, 99
Arabian Sea, 22
Asbol, 159
Ashoka, 97
Athene, Pallas, 146
Austen, Godwin, 2, 140, 146
Avalokiteshvara, statue of, 164

B

Babar, 140
Basgo, temples, 49, 54; village, 22, 31
Basti Ram, 52
Bayonets to Lhasa, 146
Beg, Daulat, 122
Beg, Mirza Haider, 47
Beg, Yakub, 53-54, 126
Bholi, 3, 6, 15, 62, 121, 157, 159, 165-66
Bodh Gaya, 99
Bodhicitta, 99-102
Bokhari, 19
Bon-po, 48
Bon religion, 48
Boza-Khar-Skyong, 48
Brahma Peak, 140
Brahmaputra river, 22, 144
Brief History of Sinkiang, 136
Broad Peak, 140
Brogpas tribe, 114
Buddha, Sakyamuni Gautam, 99
Buddhism, concept of self purification in, 93
Buddhist Gumpa Association, 96-97
Buddhist Purnirvana, anniversary of, 55
Bughra, Mohammed Amin Beg, 123
Buhl, Herman, 3
Bum La, 56

C

Capuchin missionary, 141
Caravan Route, 121
Central Asia, archeological and geographical survey of, 142-46
Central Asian Diamond, 3
Chang-chen-mo, 56
Changpas tribe, 116-17
Changthang, 74, 116, 144
Chimre, 75
Chimre gumpa, 87
Chimre monastery, 97

Chingopanari, 145
Chip Chap river, 56
Chitral, 19
Chog-tse, 62
Chospail, K., 96-97
Chou-En lai, 55
Chronicles of Ladakh, 48
Chumathang area, 158
Chushul, 53, 56
Cunningham, 98; 141, 145

D

Da-Hanu villages, 114, 116
d'Almeria, Diogo, 141
Dard villages, 113
Daughter of Tibet, 55
Daulat Beg Oldi, 56, 122
dBu-bLa, 97
Dechen, J., 50, 162
Demchog, 48
Depsang plain, 122
Desideri, Ippolito, 141
Deskit *gumpa*, 87, 121-22
Dharma Raja, 97
Dhartsig village, 116
Diana, 126
Dig, Sonam, 114
Din Mir Jamal, 137
Dolma, 73
Dorji, Phu, 138
Dras, 57
Dropas tribe, 114, 116

E

Egypt's ancient civilization, 114

F

Fa-Hien, 5
Fertility, festival of, 113-14; symbol of, 114
Field Research Laboratory, 157-59, 166
Fillippe, D., 160
Fleming, Peter, 146
Francis, John, 141
Francke, 160-61

G

Ganglas village, 121
A Gap in the History of Ladakh, 162
Gasherbrum II, 140
Gasherbrum Peak, 140
Gauri Shankar, 145
Ge-lug-pa, 97-98
Ge-lug tradition, 99
Geological Survey of India, 159
Gergan, Joseph, 161-62
Gergan, S.S., 37-38, 48, 162
Ge-Shes-Tsan, 48
Gilgit Scouts, 54
Gillet, M.C., 137

Girchey, 3
Glang-dar-ma, 48
gNa-ris-skor-sum, 48, 50-51, 113
Gobi desert, 123
Gompas, 6, 19, 31-32, 47, 49, 87-89
Gorkon village, 114, 116
Gothuk, 75
Gu-ge, 48-49
Gyalmo, 37-39, 47

H

Haider, Mirza, 49
Harappa, 22
Hari Chand, 53
Haversham, Henry, 145
Heber, 154
Hedin, Sven, 122, 145, 160, 162
Hemis, festival, 31, 75; *gumpa*, 87-91; hermitage in, 94; Lama dance at, 92-93
Hermann, Adolf, 145
Heyde, A.H., 160
Hidden Peak, 140
Himalaya, 138-42
Hindu Kush mountains, 140
History of Western Tibet, 161
Hiuen Tsang, 5
Huc, father, 142
Hunza, 137

I

Ide-tsug-Gon, 48
India, Chinese invasion in 1962, 56, 138
Indian Bureau of Mines, 159
Indo-Gangetic plain, 140
Indo-Pak conflict of 1965, 57-58
Indus, river, 22, 31-32, 164; valley, 22, 52, 145
Ister-o-Nal Peak, 140

J

Jaeschke, A.H., 160
Jahangir, 3, 50
Jesuits, French, 145
Jesuit missionary, 141
Jnanadharma kaya, 100
Jule, 157, 159, 165-66

K

K-2, 22
Kabul, 142
Kafirs and Glacier, 166
Ka-gya-pa sect, 87
Ka-gyu sect, 97
Kailash Manasarovar, 141
Kalidas, 138
Kalimpong, 136, 138
Kanchenjunga, 136
Kanjitse Peak, 140
Kapilavastu, 99

Karakoram-2, 140
 Karakoram pass, 31, 56, 122, 124, 135-36, 140, 163, 166
 Kargil sector, 32, 54-55, 113, 159
 Karsha *gumpa*, 87
 Kar Tso lake, 6
 Kashgar town, 5, 15-16, 125-26, 135, 144
 Kashmir, beauty of, 3
 Kaul, Lt. Col. Jawahar, 158
Kesar Saga, 161
 Keylong, 160-61
 Khampa-Dzong, 55
 Khan, Agbet Mohammed, 50
 Khan, Ahmed, 50
 Khan, Genghiz, 49
 Khan, Khuma, 122, 136
 Khardung-La, 121
 Khotan, 5, 145
Khudai ceremony, 31
 Khumbuthang farm, 158
 Kintup, 144-45
 Kirghiz revolt, 136
 Kumaon, 138
 Kunick, 161
 Kunkhep, Chwang, 31
 Kun Peak, 139
Kushok Bakula, 86, 164

L

Ladakh, beauty, 3; Buddhism in, 73; chain, 139-40; Chinese attack on, 56; Dogra invasion in, 51-54; education in, 73; faith in astrology in, 74; festivals of, 75; *gompas* of, 87-94; hermitage in, 94-98; irrigation systems in, 61; Kalacakra ceremony in, 98; marriage system in, 37-38, 71-73; mineral deposits in, 159; during Namgyal rule, 49-51; peculiar customs, 74-75; people & life in, 61-62, 73-74; polyandry in, 71; post-independent in developments in, 54; pre-Namgyal period of, 48-49; preservation of vegetable in, 62; safety measures for monastic treasure in, 96-97; Scouts, 38; Tibetan-Buddhist character of, 49
 Ladakh's Phonya, 161
 Ladakhi, kitchen, 62; *tsampa*, 95-96
 Lahaul, 37-38, 48
 La-Lung Pal-gyi-De-je, 48
 Lama, Dalai, 50, 52, 54-56, 97; and Kalacakra ceremony, 98-102
 Lama, Yeshe Od, 49
 Lamayuru *gumpa*, 32, 87
 Lam-Bras, 48
 Lang-dar-ma, 48
 Leh, climate of, 5-6, 19; *gompas* of, 6, 19, 31-32, 47, 87, 89; historical importance, 16; inhabitant of, 15; Palace, 6, 15; polo game in, 15; township, 6, 15; trade in, 15-16; Valley, 3, 49-50, 57, 144, 159
 Lha-Lung d Pal-gyi-rdorje, 48
 Lhasa, 15, 49-50, 55-56, 97, 141, 143-44; Buddhist Cathedral, 141; lake, 161
 Lho-Man-Thang, 50
 Likir *gumpa*, 87

Ling-Zhi-thang, 56
 Lobzang, Lama, 73, 75, 94-96
 Longstaff, 121
 'Losar', 75

M

MacCartney, George, 136
Mahabharata, 165
 Maha Buddha Society, 96
 Mallory, 3
 Mansarovar lake, 53, 165
 Marx, 160
 Masherbrum Peak, 140
 Mashrowest Peak, 140
 Mathos *gumpa*, 87
 Mayum pass, 52
Meghdut, 138
Memoirs of that Mountain, 136
 Meru Peak, 140
 Mintaka river, 136
 Mir, Ali, 49
 Mohenjodaro, 22
 Momos, Ladakhi delicacy, 62
 Mongolia, 144
 Mongol traders, 143
 Mont Blanc, 135
 Montgomery, 140, 142, 144
 Moorcroft, William, 141-42
 Morarai lake, 6
 Moravian Mission, 157, 159-60
 Moravian Mission library, 160
Mathos, 75
 Mount Everest, 19, 56-57, 94, 114, 121, 136, 140, 142-43, 145
 Mount Godwin Austen, 140
 Mount Kailash, 22, 52-53, 144, 165
Moved On, 16, 122
 Mustang pass, 140
Mulah concept, 126
 Mu-tri-tran-po-Mu-Khri-btsan-po, 48
My Life as an Explorer, 145

N

Nagchuka, 144
 Nalanda, 102
 Namgyal, Deldan, 50
 Namgyal, Delegs, 50
 Namgyal, Gyalpo Jigmed Dadul, 37
 Namgyal, Jamayang, 49, 75
 Namgyal, Jigdal, 50
 Namgyal, Jigmed, 38
 Namgyal, Karma Konchog, 47
 Namgyal, Kunzang, 37-38
 Namgyal, Nima, 50
 Namgyal, Norbu, 49
 Namgyal, Singe, 32, 49-50, 87, 97
 Namgyal, Tashi, 49
 Namgyal, Tshe-Wang, 31, 49
 Nanda Devi, 142
 Nanga Parbat, 22
 Naris, 49
 Nazarov, P.S., 16, 122

Nehru Jawaharlal, 55
New Testament, 161
 Nijhawan, Col. S.P., 17
 Nimma, 73
 Nimo village, 22
Nirmana kaya, 100
 Nisan, 142
 Niya, 145-46
 Norbu-Lingka palace, 55-56
 Norbu, Nima, 32
 Noshag Peak, 140
 Nubra, river, 121; valley, 15, 31, 33, 54, 121, 159
 Nun Kun, 159
 Nun Peak, 139

O

Odantapuri, 102
Old Testament, 161
 Oxus river, 140

P

Padam, 32
 Pagell, 160
 Pakistan, 3, 54; invasion, 54
 Pala dynasty, 102
 Panamik village, 15, 121-22
 Pangong lake, 6, 56
 Papin digester, 162
Perak, 71
 Peshawar, 15
 Peter, Bishop, 159
 Pharaohs, 114
 Phuntsog, Tsetan, 37
 Phyang *gumpa*, 87
 Pinnacle Peak, 139
 Polo, Marco, 6, 126
 Potala Palace, 49, 55-56, 87
 Puga valley, 158-59
 Pundit brothers, 142-44
Puranas, 165
 Purang, 48-49

R

Ramayana, 165
 Ratan, Wazir, 53
 Rawat, Harish, 142-43
 Razu, Stan Zin, 159-60
 Red Sect, 97
 Retslab, 160
 Rozong, *gumpa*, 87
 Rinchen, Jigme, 38, 54
 RJe Tsongkhapa, 99
 Rohilkhand, 144
 Rudok, 50, 52, 141
 Rupshu, 32, 52
 Russian Karakuli ewes, 158

S

Sakti, 75
Sambhoga kaya, 100

Samstanling *gompa*, 121
 Sanker *gompa*, 157, 164
 Saraghrar Peak, 140
 Saser chain, 139
 Saser Kangri massif, 122, 139
 Saspol, valley, 32, 140; village, 57
 Schomberg, 166
 Sela pass, 56
 Sen, Boshi, 157
 Senge Khabob, 22
 Shah, Ahmed, 52
 Shah, Mohomed, 52
 Shey, Palace, 50; village, 97, 164-65
 Shey Zimshag, 37
 Shigatse, 144
 Shipton, Eric, 126, 135-37
 Shyok, river, 121; valley, 121
 Siachen Glacier, 121
 Siberia, 57
 Siddhartha, 94
 Sikkim, 22, 54, 74, 138
 Silk Route, 3, 123
 Singh, Dev, 144
 Singh, Gulab, 47, 51-52
 Singh, Hari, 54
 Singh, Kishan, 142, 144
 Singh, Lal, 165
 Singh, Nain, 142-44
 Singh, Ranjit, 51-52, 141
 Singh, Zorawar, 51-53, 165
 Sinkiang, *see* Turkistan
 Skardu, 22, 49-50, 54, 57
 Skid-Ide-Nima-Gon, 48
 Solo Khumbu region, 114, 121
 Sonam, 61-62, 71
 Sonamarg, 48, 57
 Spal-gi-gon, 48
 Spiti, 48-49, 52, 161
 Spituk *gompa*, 75, 87
 Srinagar, 3, 15-16, 32
 Srub-Lha, 113
 Stag-tsang-raspa, 97
 Stakna *gompa*, 87
 Stein, Aurel, 5, 145-46, 162, 167

Stok chain, 139-40
 Stok Kangri Peak, 37, 140
 Stolitzsky, 163
 Suddhodhana, 99
 Sumoor *gompa*, 121-22
 Suru valley, 159
 Sutlej river, 138, 145
 Svabhava kaya, 100-01

T

Tabo, 49
 Taklakot, 52
 Takrimo *gompa*, 87
 Takthak *gompa*, 87
 Tangtse, 53
 Taring, Jigme, 55-56
 Taring, Rinchen Dolma, 55
 Tashekuraghan, 136
 Tashi-gon, 48
 Tashigong, 49, 52
Te Deum Laudamus, 141
 Tenga valley, 50
 Tengri Nor Lake, 144
 Tenzing, Lakhpa, 136-38
 Tenzing, Rinzing, 136
 Tezpur, 56
Thab-La-Gyamo, 62
 Thiksay *gompa*, 75, 87
 Thok Daurakpa, 51, 144
 Thok Jalung, 51, 144
 Tholing, 49
 Thyangboche lamasery, 94
 Tibet, 3, 52, 74, 97, 138; Buddhism in, 48-49,
 Chinese invasion, 55-56
 Tirich Mir Peak, 140
 Trak-bum-de, 97
 Treaty Road, 121
 Trebeck, George, 141-42
 Trench, Cap., 15
 Tsang, 50
 Tsanpo, 138, 144
 Tsering Dolma, 56
 Tsondus, Venerable Geshe, 94

Turkistan, 3, 19, 44-45, 53, 55, 121, 123, 125, 135
 Twang, 56

U

Uemura, Naomi, 140
 Utpala, 49
 Uttar Pradesh Agricultural Research Station,
 158

V

Valley of Flowers, 6
 Via Dolorose, 122
 Vikramasila, 102
 Vittoz, Pier, 159
 Von Schlagintweit, Robert, 145

W

Wangmo, Deskit, 37-38
 Wangyal, Abhechand alias Hime, 37
 Wangyal, Sonam, 96, 159
 Weber, 162
 White Needle Peak, 140
 Wood, Capt., 145

Y

Yarkand, 5, 15-16, 31, 52-53, 55, 122, 125, 144,
 156; river, 123
 Yatung, 55
 Yellow-robed sect, 98
 Yoksom, 57
 Younghusband, Col. Francis, 19, 55, 136, 146

Z

Zangla, 32-33
 Zangpo, Rinchen, 49
 Zanskar, 32-33, 48-49; chain, 139-40; *gompa*, 87;
 river, 22, 159
 Zoli La, 55, 57
 Zorawar Fort, 51, 160





